

FRONTIER CAPITALIST:
THE ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY OF WILLIAM CURRIE JONES

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ZACHARY DOWDLE

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by
ZACHARY DOWDLE

APPROVED:

Dr. Jason Pierce

Dr. David Dewar

Dr. John Klingemann

Dr. Teresa Hack

April 16, 2014

APPROVED:

Dr. Susan E. Keith
Dean of the College Graduate Studies

ABSTRACT

William Currie Jones, a Tom Green County pioneer, arrived in Texas in 1878 finding a region that verged on being a raw frontier. Jones employed economic flexibility over the course of his career, adapting to the dynamic western market. Due to his early acquisition of land with river frontage and manipulation of the environment, Jones capitalized on his wealth of natural resources by expanding into town building and real estate promotion. As Congress in Washington manipulated tariffs at the expense of western woolgrowers, Jones found opportunity in other industries. Jones evolved along with the county and region, displaying an increasing economic sophistication. By the end of his life, the one-time rancher had turned to the emerging exploration of hydrocarbons, predating the discovery of the Permian Basin oil fields by a decade. Jones embodied the pioneer spirit, which allowed him considerable success during his lifetime.

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INTRODUCTION

Arriving in Tom Green County in 1878, four years after the county's creation by the Texas Legislature, William Currie Jones established a ranch and began a career that spanned more than forty years, a career that reflected the realities of life in rugged West Texas. Upon his arrival in West Texas, Jones worked to accumulate extensive land holdings. Initially he used that land to raise sheep. However, after an unsuccessful attempt to block a highway from Eldorado to San Angelo from bisecting his property, Jones decided to use the new thoroughfare to his advantage. He platted a new town on his land, straddling the road. Jones built a church and began to boast about the opportunities in his newly created town of Christoval on the South Concho River. The proximity of the village increased the value of all of Jones' land in the area. He began to sell town lots consisting of one-quarter of an acre for \$25 and small irrigated farms for \$40 an acre—on land he purchased for less than \$3 an acre. By the time of his death, Jones had become a wealthy man and pillar of the community. His story parallels the development of western Texas.

Environmental conditions in Tom Green County presented remarkable challenges for ranchers like Jones. Extremes in rainfall, from the swift destruction of flooding to the attrition of a drought, meant the people who derived their livelihood from the land had to constantly shift their strategies or fail. In 1882, Jones purchased one-quarter interest in the South Concho Irrigation Company from George Washington DeLong. DeLong and his brothers had only recently constructed the three-mile long irrigation system at the cost of \$400 per mile. Jones' ownership in the irrigation company allowed him to market irrigated

farms near Christoval in an attempt to foster a larger, more stable population in the region. In 1900, he purchased the first pear burner in Tom Green County. The device operated as a flamethrower, incinerating the painful needles off the prickly pear so cattle could safely eat the ubiquitous plant. Jones frequently proclaimed the benefits of the device to the ranching community through newspaper publications.

Jones participated in many political battles during his career. At the national level, the Wilson-Gorman Tariff of 1894 provoked a shift in political allegiance for Tom Green County. That year sheep raisers in the region rallied behind Republican George Noonan's campaign, challenging the Democratic Party's hegemony in western Texas. Sheep ranchers' reactions to the tariff varied, but Jones, through his flexibility, chose to quit the sheep raising business altogether, opting to deal solely with his lucrative property, cattle, and horse businesses. A second major political challenge came from a Texas Constitutional amendment initiative in 1897 to provide public control over private irrigation operations in the western two-thirds of the state. This movement sought to provide equalized access to water among the more arid counties. Jones, being an owner of a private irrigation company, vehemently opposed the movement, which ultimately failed.

Operating a ranch in West Texas during the turn of the nineteenth century exposed Jones to experience the quintessential narrative of the "wild west." His thirty-year-old son, Robert, happened upon a camp as he rode on his property early one summer morning. By the time Robert reached the site, the individual who stood by his tent lifted his Winchester rifle and shot the young rancher five times, with two of the rounds careening through his horse's neck before hitting him. The killer, Archie Taylor Wright, had challenged Jones' claim to the land, which had recently been released by the State of Texas for purchase by new settlers.

Robert Jones convinced his younger sister to apply for the land, an act that Archie challenged in court. Robert went to find Archie that morning to intimidate the would-be settler who threatened Jones' access to the ranchland. Robert and Archie had grown up together in the South Concho area, both having come from prominent ranching families. Archie had just a year earlier successfully petitioned to have Schleicher County separate from Menard County to its east. Texas prosecutors eventually dropped the murder charges against Wright, contending they did not have a case. The incident illustrated the tension between ranchers and settlers in the acquisition of cheap land offered by the state. This perceived injustice sickened W. C. and his wife, Margaret, and within a year, they moved to San Angelo to escape the violence they experienced.

Jones took to life in the city with the same sort of flexibility he displayed while living on his ranch. The intrepid entrepreneur began to purchase land near the town with hopes of establishing his own residential subdivision. The subdivision he created, called the Jones Subdivision, consisted of six lots of five acres each north of San Angelo. W. C. built a new mansion nearby and promoted the area with the same enthusiasm as he did Christoval. By 1906, Jones began to transact land deals quite often, ever expanding his holdings and subdividing larger sections into smaller parcels. Eventually, he eschewed directly transferring land and began to buy promissory notes, from which he would profit on the interest. This strategy resulted in myriad lawsuits where Jones attempted to receive payment on the outstanding debts.

None of W. C. Jones' personal documents have survived. Nevertheless, considerable material remains to reconstruct his life. The *San Angelo Standard* provided a constant update

on the activities of prominent citizens, Jones included. Many significant stories and anecdotes lay in the decades of coverage by the newspaper. County court cases illuminate the legal issues with which he struggled throughout his life. The first decade of his time in Tom Green County saw Jones defending the title to lands he purchased. Petty squabbles about fences and livestock dominated much of the 1890s, while debt collection became paramount for Jones during the 1900s and 1910s. Each of these periods represents the growing pains of the individual's attempt to make a life in the region, but also represents the stages of settlement in the area, slowly becoming more urban. The criminal court case tells the story of the murder of his son, and, what Jones believed to be the lack of justice on the frontier.

Deed records outline the numerous transactions, sales, purchases and leases, providing a telling view of Jones' financial circumstances. Both deeds of trust and mechanic's liens indicate debt owed to and by Jones and his family during their lives. County commissioners' court minutes, census records, probate materials, Texas General Land Office records, and post office records provide additional views of the life of Jones and the effect he had in the county and the region. Finally, interviews with decedents will infuse some family anecdotes in the multitude of legal document to provide some color and explain the reasons behind his actions. Secondary sources will establish context to significant issues like immigration to the West, sheep and cattle industries, irrigation, drought, the tariff battle in 1894, and the beginning of oil exploration in West Texas.

While W. C. Jones maintained a ranch for the entire period, economic and environmental challenges compelled him to display financial flexibility. Working with sheep, cattle, horses, real estate, land financing, and finally the oil and gas industry, Jones

grew with the local economy, often working as a trendsetter. Jones adopted new technology—from windmills to pear burners—relatively early, and took the time to promote the benefits of the technology to his peers. In this sense, the story of W. C. Jones mirrored the development of Tom Green County and West Texas. Examining his life through the lenses of westward expansion, economic development, and the environment provides insight into the ways successful pioneers thrived, despite setbacks and hardships, in Tom Green County.

CHAPTER I

THE LONG ROAD TO TEXAS

On April 22, 1840, in the rural village of Denbigh, Wales, Ellen Jones gave birth to her first son.¹ William Jones came into the world during a period of great change in Wales and the island of Great Britain as a whole. The middle of the nineteenth century represented the culmination of the sweeping economic reformation called the industrial revolution. Wales occupied an important role during this transformation. It boasted abundant coalfields in the southern portion of the nation providing the requisite energy for the movement. Colliers and labors flooded into the southern counties of Wales to meet the demand, creating a significant population strain in the region.

Denbigh, however, did not experience the same pressure as its southern neighbors. The village served as the county town of Denbighshire and maintained a small population as an anchor to the agrarian northern section of the country. Denbigh experienced considerably less emigration to the United States during the middle of the nineteenth century when compared to its more economically advantaged southern neighbors. This trend can be explained by the relative lack of population pressure in the region. The agrarian families that made the journey across the ocean, most of whom after the mid-1840s, did so because of

¹ Jerry Lackey, *Homestead: Pioneers of Texas' Frontier, Volume II* (San Angelo, TX: Windmill Country Media, 2013), 7.

capitalist pressure on traditional agricultural processes, including the fencing of communal land, mechanization of farming, and changes in the market.²

Growing up in this bucolic setting impressed upon William the importance of land ownership. His immigration as a single young man pointed to his desire to increase his economic opportunity in the United States. However, most of his cohort made the journey across the ocean for greater industrial opportunities, not to farm the land. The few immigrants from Wales who went to the United States during the middle of the nineteenth century with hopes of farming or ranching did so based on the presumption of cheap, abundant land. Landlords in Wales owned vast swaths of the territory in the agrarian north, preventing the young, land-hungry sons of tenant farmers from acquiring their own property.³ Because William, the eldest son, found it necessary to leave his homeland for greater opportunities, his family likely did not hold claim to land wealth.

Little of William's early life in the old country has been preserved. In all, William had ten siblings, two of whom died in infancy. Only two of the sisters remained in Great Britain. Annie Jones took residence in Liverpool, while Catherine continued to live in Wales with her husband, Mr. Hughes. A third sister, Maggie, died in Chicago in 1900. Elizabeth had one daughter, Teresa Humphrey, and lived her life in Williamsburg, Iowa. Mary married a man named Perry and made a home in Portage, Wisconsin. William's only brother, John H.

² Anne Kelly Knowles, "Immigrant Trajectories Through the Rural-Industrial Transition in Wales and the United States, 1795-1850," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 85, no. 2 (June 1995): 254-6.

³ William E. Van Vugt, "Welsh Emigration to the U.S.A. during the Mid-Nineteenth Century, *Welsh History Review* 15, no. 4 (December 1991), 550; David Williams, *History of Modern Wales*, (London: John Murray, 1950), 259-60.

Jones first settled in Kansas, but spent some time in Tom Green County before ultimately moving to the newly created state of Oklahoma. Jane Jones, the youngest of the siblings, moved to Tom Green County and remained unmarried during her life, helping William with his family.⁴ The fact that all except for one of the Jones siblings left Wales again indicated the lack of economic opportunities open to them in Denbigh.

American entrepreneurs courted restless individuals in the United Kingdom to bolster the population of the sparse western portion of the United States. Railroad companies in the United States held the largest interest in creating markets from the dusty prairies, so they employed boosterism to encourage immigration. By boasting about unlimited amounts of land and generally healthy climates, these publications sought to highlight the benefits of the United States through the manipulation of traditional old-world anxieties. Young people in Great Britain had considerable difficulty finding land available for sale, especially at affordable prices.⁵

Unfortunately, the exact chronology of the Jones family immigration to the United States remains unclear. Evidence suggesting the parents stayed in Wales comes from the 1930 United States Census. In that year, William's youngest sister Jane stated she immigrated to the United States in 1884 from Wales as a twenty-four-year-old. This corresponded to the first account of Jones in the *San Angelo Standard*. On May 31, 1884, the

⁴Sadie Jones Weddell, interviewed by Sadie Weddell Puckitt, San Angelo, TX, early 1950s, copy of original transcript owned by Alice and George Sisco, San Angelo, TX.

⁵ Oscar O. Winther, "Promoting the American West in England, 1865-1890" *The Journal of Economic History* 16, no. 4 (December 1956): 508-509.

Standard reported, "W. C. Jones, with two of his sisters and several Welshmen, arrived in San Angelo from Wales a few days ago."⁶

Family lore places William Jones's immigration to New York in 1858 at the age of eighteen. The *Standard* corroborated this account of his immigration at the time of his death in 1918.⁷ His brother John also immigrated to the United States at some point. John was born in 1847, so he would have been only eleven if he crossed with William in 1858. Furthermore, John stated in the 1910 federal census taken in Oklahoma that he immigrated in 1868 when he was twenty-one.⁸ William did not give consistent responses when expressing his immigration history to census enumerators. During the 1900 census Jones replied that both he and Margaret came to this country just thirty years earlier, in 1870. Jones modified this information during the interview for the 1910 census. Then he stated he immigrated in 1865.

Margaret Currie had a much shorter trip to immigrate to the United States. She was born to Robert and Sarah Brand Currie in Nova Scotia, Canada, on September 17, 1840. Robert Currie spent his early life in Dumfries, Scotland, while Sarah Brand was born in Glasgow. They married in 1800 and immigrated to Canada in 1838, just two years prior to Margaret's birth. The Currie family immigrated to the United States in about 1845 and settled in Columbia County, Wisconsin. Margaret had six siblings, all of whom moved to Texas upon reaching adulthood. Her only sister, Mary Currie married R. C. Sanderson and

⁶*San Angelo Standard*, May 31, 1884.

⁷*San Angelo Standard*, November 22, 1918.

⁸Thirteenth Census of the United States: 1910-Population, Payne County, Oklahoma, Supervisor's District 1, Enumeration District 198, Sheet 4.

established their family in San Angelo before William and Margaret moved to the area. Brothers Robert, John, and James all made their homes in the area around Big Spring, Texas. William Brand Currie settled in Garden City, Texas, and Joseph in Midland County.⁹

While there have been a few accounts about where Margaret and William met, the federal census records provide some insight on their story. In July of 1860, twenty-year-old Margaret lived in her parents' home in Springvale, Columbia County, Wisconsin. Adjacent lived her older sister Mary and her husband Robert with their two young children.¹⁰ By June 1870, ten years later, Margaret and William were married and had established a home in Columbia County. Margaret's father Robert resided with them, suggesting his wife Sarah died sometime in the previous decade.¹¹

The 1870 Census recorded the Jones family three years after William and Margaret's marriage. On September 22, 1867, they vowed to spend the rest of their lives together.¹² It is difficult to know with certainty if William's parents gave him a middle name when he was born. His brother John used the initial "H" as a part of his legal name. That initial could have been his mother's maiden name, Hughes. The Welsh had a few tremendously common permanent surnames, which led to significant confusion in determining one's family ties. To overcome this issue, the Welsh took to the practice of applying the mother's maiden name to

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰Eighth Census of the United States: 1860-Population, Columbia County, Wisconsin, Page 181.

¹¹Ninth Census of the United States: 1870-Population, Columbia County, Wisconsin, Page 18.

¹²Sadie Jones Weddell, interviewed by Sadie Weddell Puckitt, San Angelo, TX, early 1950s, copy of original transcript.

the family's surname.¹³ If William had a middle name prior to his marriage, it may have been Hughes. After his marriage, he went by the name William Currie Jones, eventually just using the initials W. C.

W. C. lived in Columbia County, Wisconsin, for some time before his marriage in 1867. After their marriage, the Joneses lived together in Wisconsin for no longer than five years. Margaret gave birth to their first daughter, Sarah (known as Sadie), on June 19, 1868—nine months after their wedding. Fewer than two years later, the Joneses had a second daughter at their Wisconsin home. Mary Ellen (Minnie) was born on February 23, 1870. The 1870 census occurred in June of that year. Between 1870 and 1872 W. C. moved his family to New Hampton, Iowa, in the northeastern corner of the state.

Again, the length of time the Jones family spent in their new home state is not entirely clear. While in Iowa, Margaret gave birth to two more children, both sons.¹⁴ Their first son, Robert Currie Jones, was born March 26, 1872. Just thirteen months later William (Will) Currie Jones, Jr. came into this world on April 14, 1873.¹⁵ Within just a few years of the birth of Will, the Joneses had decided to pack up their possessions and move further south to Texas.

The stories about the family's trip to Texas vary wildly. One account has the Joneses homesteading in Kansas for two years following the birth of Will. In this version, W. C.

¹³T. E. Morris, "Welsh Surnames," in *Bye-gones, Relating to Wales and the Border Counties, 1893-94*, vol. 3(Owestry & Wrexham: London, 1895), 193.

¹⁴Tenth Census of the United States: 1880-Population, Tom Green County, Texas, Supervisor's District 5, Enumeration District 120, Page 12.

¹⁵ Jerry Lackey, *Homestead*, 7.

decided to abandon the Kansas land after a plague of locusts destroyed their crop both years.¹⁶ Other accounts bypass the Kansas story and have the Joneses moving from Iowa to Texas in the late 1870s.¹⁷ There are no records of W. C. homesteading in Kansas, however, John H. Jones, W. C.'s brother, made his home in Kansas. In 1880 John lived in Decatur County, Kansas, with his wife Anna, his stepson Edwin Goodenough, and his newborn son John W. Jones.¹⁸ The relative dearth of documentation relating to the early years of W. C. and Margaret's marriage leaves much to the imagination, but after their family moved to Texas, the story of their lives becomes far clearer.

Jones' propensity for moving his family around the country in search of economic opportunity conforms to general observations of immigrant mobility during the period. Just as W. C. and most of his siblings chose a younger, less established country to seek better fortunes, Jones looked to less developed regions of the United States in his search for inexpensive land. Once the first waves of immigrants claimed initial land inducements, opportunities to acquire land at low prices became far less common.¹⁹ Jones began in Wisconsin and traveled southwest to Iowa, but in each case, he found he had missed his opportunity at acquiring cheap land. Jones sought to be among the first wave of settlers,

¹⁶ Jerry Lackey, *Homestead*, 7; Caption at the Christoval Pioneer Museum, Christoval, Texas. Even these two accounts differ on when they actually arrived at Ben Ficklin, Texas. The Christoval Museum Caption does not account for the time spent in Iowa, however.

¹⁷ *San Angelo Standard*, November 22, 1918; Sadie Jones Weddell, interviewed by Sadie Weddell Puckitt.

¹⁸ Tenth Census of the United States: 1880-Population, Decatur County, Kansas, Supervisor's District 3, Enumeration District 56, Sheet 16.

¹⁹ Gordon W. Kirk, Jr. and Carolyn Tyirin Kirk. "The Immigrant, Economic Opportunity and Type of Settlement in Nineteenth-Century America," *Journal of Economic History* 38, no. 1 (March 1978): 228-9.

which would allow him to maximize his investment in land and satisfy his thirst for property ownership. Tom Green County, only four years old, beckoned to W. C. Jones as a place of possibilities, a place with land enough and room enough for an ambitious young man seeking to create an agrarian empire.

CHAPTER II

QUENCHING THE THIRST FOR LAND

The different accounts of the family's wanderings converge on the idea that the Joneses took a train to San Antonio, Texas, sometime in the middle to late 1870s. From San Antonio, the family traveled on a stagecoach to the town of Ben Ficklin—then the county seat of Tom Green County. W. C. spent some time in San Antonio outfitting himself and his family for the journey to the western part of the state. In addition to the requisite materials the family needed, W. C. purchased several head of sheep to take along and hired a man to help him handle his newly acquired livestock. The arduous trip with children ranging from ten to four years of age must have been quite an experience. They left San Antonio on June 3 and arrived in Tom Green County two months later.¹ Along the way, the family stopped at the Llano River near Mason, Texas, to recuperate. During the weeklong rest, Margaret used the waters of the river to wash the clothes of her trail-worn family and bake yeast bread to last them the rest of the trip because W. C. did not like biscuits or cornbread.²

The Jones family rode into Ben Ficklin during the hottest part of the year. Nothing in Wisconsin or Iowa would have prepared them for the blistering heat of West Texas in August. Regardless of the weather, they needed some sort of shelter while they found land to settle. J. L. Millspaugh, the Fort Concho sutler, provided W. C. with two large army tents to

¹Sadie Jones Weddell, interviewed by Sadie Weddell Puckitt.

²Lackey, *Homestead*, 7; Christoval Pioneer Museum.

give the family with some protection from the elements.³ Millspaugh later married Margaret's niece, Sarah Sanderson. The Sandersons moved from Cambria, Wisconsin, in 1876, thus providing Margaret and her family an advantage in the Concho Valley upon their arrival.⁴

Indeed, like many immigrant groups the Sandersons, Curries, and Joneses represented an ethnic enclave that, through word-of-mouth, worked to populate the region. As Margaret's family trickled into the western portion of Texas, they wrote to the Joneses of the abundant opportunities in the region. Inexpensive land represented one major consideration for the family coming from the more cultivated states in the northern plains. The Curries also discussed the favorable conditions existing around Tom Green County for growing wool. Robert Sanderson and the Currie brothers moved to Texas to raise sheep. Jones followed just a few years later, with the assistance of a sizeable loan from a friend.⁵

Some sources claim the Joneses arrived in Tom Green County as early as 1874 and others claim the date to have been August 1876.⁶ However, a financial agreement of W. C.'s places their arrival during August 1878.⁷ Jones required a loan to finance the move from Iowa to Texas. Within days of relocating to Ben Ficklin, W. C. recorded his payment of \$823.50 to Mandeville Burgit of Chickasaw County, Iowa. Burgit, a sixty-year-old native of

³Sadie Jones Weddell, interviewed by Sadie Weddell Puckitt.

⁴*San Angelo Standard*, April 11, 1896.

⁵ Bill Strauss, interview by author, San Angelo, Texas, June 19, 2013.

⁶ The Christoval Pioneer Museum places their arrival in 1874 while Jerry Lackey argues 1876.

⁷Tom Green County Deed of Trust, Book A, 152-3.

New York State, operated a large farm near New Hampton, Iowa—the birthplace of Will C. Jones.⁸ Burgit loaned Jones the large sum of money (\$823.50 would equal \$19,311.85 in 2012 dollars) with a promissory note for \$500 due within sixty days of the original loan and the remaining \$323.50 due fourteen months after the original date.⁹ Jones paid the first note of the debt to Burgit with 1,500 head of sheep.¹⁰ The terms of the deal suggest Burgit intended to have Jones secure \$500 worth of sheep from Texas for Burgit's Iowa farm, with the remaining \$323.50 functioning as a loan for Jones.

After recording the first installment of payment to his benefactor, Burgit, Jones wasted no time in securing access to land to raise sheep. On October 1, 1878, W. C. leased one hundred sixty acres of land on the west bank of the South Concho River known as Survey 897 in the name of F. V. Westenbustel, just to the northwest of modern-day Christoval. Jones leased the land for five years, with payment of "ten dollars to be paid at the office of Lackey and Foote in the town of Ben Ficklin on the 1st day of January in each of the years 1879, 1880, 1881, 1882, and 1883."¹¹ According to the lease, Jones had complete access to this riverfront property but did not have the right to utilize the abundant lumber for commercial purposes. The agreement allowed for reasonable harvesting of lumber for the construction of necessary structures on the land, however. This initial lease gave W. C. the land necessary to begin his career in Tom Green County as a sheep rancher. Open access to

⁸*History of Kossuth and Humboldt Counties, Iowa* (Union Publishing Company: Springfield, Il, 1884), 744.

⁹ Inflation rates calculated at <http://www.westegg.com/inflation/infl.cgi>

¹⁰Tom Green County Deed of Trust book A, 152-3.

¹¹Tom Green County Deed of Trust, Book A, 174.

the flowing waters of the South Concho River alleviated any uncertainty Jones may have had regarding the semi-arid climate in west-central Texas.

Arriving in Tom Green County in 1878 meant Jones had missed the initial wave of land appropriations. During the ten years Texas stood as an independent nation, government officials worked to entice potential immigrants with cheap land. Burchard Miller and Henry Fisher, both Germans, received a grant from the Republic of Texas in 1842 that included sections of land abutting the rivers and major streams in Tom Green County and other counties in the region. The Fisher-Miller Grant represented one of many given by the fledgling nation to German settlement organizations, however, the land provided to Fisher and Miller extended deep into the uncharted western frontier of Texas.¹²

Fisher and Miller received access to nearly four million acres of land free of charge. Sam Houston's government, relocated to Washington-on-the-Brazos due to continued threat of hostility from the Mexican government, expected results from the colonization group. In all Fisher and Miller promised to locate six thousand families within their grant, allotting 640 acres to families and half that to single men. The contractors had to fund the initial surveys, but would be permitted to retain half of the land they granted—almost two million acres total. Finally, Texas required the two men have ten percent of their quota met within eighteen months.¹³

¹² Jefferson Morgenthauer, *Promised Land: Solms, Castro, and Sam Houston's Colonization Contracts* (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 2009), 28-29.

¹³ Irene Marschall King, *John O. Meusenbach: German Colonizer in Texas* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1967), 43.

An unfortunate reality faced those German settlers who purchased sections of land from Fisher and Miller. Their land grant lay directly in a region claimed by Comanche Indians. Since 1757, after the fall of the Presidio of San Saba, the Comanche had held undisputed command of the very territory granted to Fisher and Miller. German families that paid the \$240 deposit for their waterfront property found life in the region impossible as any encroachment would lead to a violent Comanche response. Many of these would-be colonizers stopped their westward advance in the Texas Hill Country, to the east of the Fisher-Miller Grant, and either sold their land or defaulted on their taxes.¹⁴

Two decades later, following the Civil War, the United States government established Fort Concho on the confluence of the North and Middle Concho Rivers as an outpost to prevent Indians from protecting their long-held lands from intruding settlers. With the backing of the United States Army, early Anglo settlers came in and acquired significant land holdings for small amounts of capital. After the formation of the Tom Green County government, many of the Fisher-Miller surveys in the area found themselves in sheriff's auctions for non-payment of taxes. Prime riverfront real estate came into the possession of the earliest pioneers, who then could sell those lands for remarkable profits.¹⁵

In this environment, W. C. began purchasing the land that would become the heart of his ranching operation on the South Concho River. The first piece of property W. C. bought in Tom Green County consisted of twenty-eight acres on the western bank of the South

¹⁴ King, *Meusenbach*, 69.

¹⁵ William Curry Holden, *Alkali Trails: Social and Economic Movements of the Texas Frontier 1846 - 1900* (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 1998), 69.

Concho known as Survey 959, the G. F. Laechlin Survey. This bit of land, located just north of the modern town of Christoval, cost Jones \$14 to procure in June of 1879.¹⁶ Jones' first piece of land possessed invaluable access to the abundant, spring-fed waters of the South Concho River, a trend he worked to duplicate. The relatively small size of the tract of land mattered little since it would serve more as a home base for Jones' sheep herd, which would use the open range for its foraging needs. Choosing land next to the river demonstrated the importance of access to water, and Jones' choice illustrated how quickly he came to understand its importance in West Texas.

At the age of thirty-nine, Margaret Jones gave birth to her fifth and final child in their newly adopted home state of Texas. Elizabeth (Lizzie) Jones was born on September 26, 1879, on the property W. C. purchased just months before. At the time of Lizzie's birth Sadie was eleven years old, Minnie was nine, Rob was seven and Will was six. The birth of Lizzie occurred just four days after W. C. and Margaret celebrated the anniversary of their twelfth year of marriage. As the 1880s dawned over the horizon, the Joneses settled into their new community on the South Concho River with their family completed and their prospects for happiness never brighter.

After just three years W. C. increased his land holdings quite significantly. In fact, during the year 1882, he bought seven sections of land totaling 4,480 acres. On January 8, 1882, W. C. purchased a section from John Manning located in what would later become Sterling County—to the northwest of his original piece of property.¹⁷ Aside from that

¹⁶Tom Green County Deed Records, Book C, 285.

¹⁷Tom Green County Deed Records, Book H, 1.

isolated section, which would be sold within a year, the remaining sections of land would form the nucleus of his South Concho Ranch, including the land upon which he would later build the town of Christoval. On December 4, 1882, W. C. Jones bought from George Washington DeLong the James Eldridge Survey (Survey 73) along with four adjacent sections along the South Concho.¹⁸ DeLong and his brothers, Samuel and David, were among the first settlers in the South Concho River area.¹⁹ Indeed, the school the Jones children attended when they arrived in Tom Green County went by the name of the DeLong School.²⁰ DeLong included one-quarter interest in the irrigation ditch, charging Jones with the partial responsibility of maintaining the accompanying dam of the irrigation system.²¹ For the five sections of riverfront property, including access to the irrigation system, W. C. paid DeLong five thousand dollars. Half of that sum went toward the purchase of just 640 acres known as the Albert Black Survey, while the other half secured the other 2,560 acres. While the deed records do not disclose the reason for this disparity, one might guess the majority of improvements located on the land in question must have been on the Albert Black Survey.

Jones' purchase into the South Concho Irrigation Company represented a significant decision for his economic future. The one hundredth meridian stood as the demarcation between the portion of the United States that receives sufficient rainfall for agriculture and

¹⁸Tom Green County Deed Records, Book H, 409 & 421.

¹⁹Clarice Atkins McMillan, "Christoval, Texas: 1874-1968," Christoval Vertical File, West Texas Collection, Angelo State University, San Angelo, Texas.

²⁰Sadie Jones Weddell, interviewed by Sadie Weddell Puckitt.

²¹Tom Green County Deed Records, Book H, 424.

the more arid western half.²² Tom Green County lies just west of the line. From the establishment of Fort Concho to the time Jones obtained one-quarter interest in the irrigation company, Tom Green County had received an average annual rainfall of 22.55 inches. However, the unequal distribution of that precipitation rendered much of that water useless for agricultural purposes. In those fifteen years, the annual precipitation ranged from a high of 42.12 inches in 1882 (the year the town of Ben Ficklin succumbed to a flood) to 11.66 in 1876. Eight of the fifteen years saw annual rainfall remain well below the 20-inch mark deemed necessary for growing crops without irrigation.²³

The brothers George, Samuel and David DeLong filed to incorporate the South Concho Irrigation Company with the Texas Secretary of State on May 10, 1875, with a stated operating capital of \$6,000. Six years later, in 1881, the men constructed the plant near their South Concho land holdings, about twenty miles south of San Angelo. Their operation consisted of a brush-and-rock dam measuring seventy feet long and seven feet wide that cost \$600 to build. The corresponding ditch ran through their property for three miles with an average width of seven feet and depth of sixteen inches. At \$400 per mile, the ditch and dam together cost \$1800 to construct.²⁴

²² Donald Worster, *Dust Bowl: The Southern Plains in the 1930s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 85.

²³"Database of rainfall records—1867-present," *San Angelo Standard Times*, retrieved from <http://www.gosanangelo.com/data/rainfall-totals/1867-present/>

²⁴ Thomas U. Taylor, *Irrigation Systems of Texas* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1902), 73-74; George W. Smith, *Biennial Report of the Secretary of State of the State of Texas, 1894* (Austin: Ben C. Jones & Co., 1895), 64.

To help fund his rapid acquisition of land, W. C. mortgaged the property he bought to his brother-in-law, James Currie. Jones signed a single promissory note for three thousand dollars on November 1, 1882. The note held the due date of December 1, 1883. Currie, however, did not release the lien until January 24, 1889, when he acknowledged "full payment and satisfaction of said promissory note both principal and interest."²⁵ James Currie, just a few years younger than his sister, Margaret, allowed his sister and brother-in-law to postpone payment to him in order to alleviate other financial strains. To produce the funds to pay off the loan, Jones had to refinance the mortgage through J. Gordon Brown out of Austin.²⁶ Jones, in fact, would have his land held in mortgages until the turn of the century.

For the next two years, W. C. continued to work on increasing the property he owned in the region. In 1883, the burgeoning rancher bought a combined five sections of land in southern Tom Green County. The bulk of this acquisition included 2,560 acres purchased from the Houston and Texas Central Railroad (H&TCRR) at \$2.50 an acre.²⁷ These four sections of railroad land at the northern extreme of the H&TCRR Block 22, just to the northwest of Jones's riverfront land. Because the State of Texas granted railroads odd-numbered sections, none of the four sections were adjacent to each other.²⁸ Instead they formed a checkerboard pattern, each being at a diagonal from the others. In addition to this

²⁵Tom Green County Deed of Trust, Book J, 79.

²⁶Tom Green County Deed of Trust, Book J, 67.

²⁷Tom Green County Deed Records, Book G, 389.

²⁸ Edward T. Price, *Dividing the Land: Early American Beginnings of our Private Property Mosaic* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1995), 318-19.

purchase, the State of Texas issued W. C. a 640-acre tract of land just south of the property he already held by virtue of land scrip.²⁹

While the scrip cost Jones little money, he bought the four sections from the railroad on credit. W. C. paid \$1,280 up front and signed four promissory notes, each for \$1,280, due at one-year intervals. Adjusting these payments for inflation, this one transaction cost Jones \$31,049.60 per year for four years, plus eight percent interest. To help fund his land acquisition, Jones recorded his first land sale in the summer of 1883. Jerome Dowling bought a 1600-acre plot of land from Jones, which included the grant he received from the state, for \$4,800 total. Dowling paid \$500 at the time of the sale and signed promissory notes for the remaining \$4,300.³⁰ The property Dowling bought was a continuous 1600 acres that adjoined the South Concho River. This influx of money, all of which Dowling had paid to Jones by March of 1885, helped him withstand the enormous burden of the debt he had incurred.

This overview of property accumulation should not create the impression that Jones merely speculated in land during this time. On the contrary, Jones engaged in raising sheep from the time he arrived in Tom Green County. By the beginning of 1884, W. C. Jones ranked among some of the largest sheepmen in the county by owning over three thousand head.³¹ W. C. did not, however, strictly raise sheep. The same issue of the *Standard* listed him as one of the top farmers in the region, having one hundred acres of land under

²⁹Tom Green County Deed Records, Book J, 487.

³⁰Tom Green County Deed Records, Book M, 288.

³¹*San Angelo Standard*, October 4, 1884.

cultivation.³² Unfortunately, the paper did not indicate what crop or crops Jones produced in 1884. The circumstances behind the publication of this information in the local newspaper held significance. The *Standard* produced and printed the October 4, 1884, edition of their paper expressly to promote Tom Green County at the World's Fair in New Orleans, Louisiana. For a member of the community to be listed as a prominent citizen in this issue represented an immense honor.

Additionally, the scramble to adequately expand his ranchland did not deter from the duty he felt toward his family. Sometime during the early part of 1884, W. C. made the long journey back to his homeland of Wales. The excursion took several months altogether, considering the substantial overland trip back to a railroad, then the prolonged voyage across the Atlantic Ocean. Jones returned to San Angelo during the last week of May 1884 "with two of his sisters and several Welshmen."³³ One of the two sisters who returned with W. C. was Jane Jones. Jane was born nineteen years after W. C., presumably his youngest sister being only twenty-five at the time of her immigration. The identity of the other sister said to have arrived in San Angelo at that time remains unknown. Jones brought to Texas several others from Wales, indicating the high level of optimism W. C. felt about the financial prospects of the area.

By 1885, W. C. focused more on producing on the land he owned rather than purchasing more tracts. In May of that year, Jones placed an advertisement in the *Standard* in an attempt to sell some of his 1,800 head of wethers, or castrated sheep, that ranged from

³²Ibid.

³³*San Angelo Standard*, May 31, 1884.

four to six years old and were "in excellent condition."³⁴ Just a few weeks later, W. C. sold his wool clip of 18,000 pounds in Abilene, Texas, for fifteen cents per pound, earning him \$2,700. After securing that sale, Jones traveled to Chicago to place 1,400 muttons on the market.³⁵ The wide range of travel involved in Jones' transactions shows the incredible degree of connections maintained by the livestock market in Tom Green County, even prior to being connected to the rest of the nation by a railroad. Upon returning to his ranch, W. C. encountered "a slim man of medium height, with thin red whiskers."³⁶ Unfortunately, sometime during his visit, this lone stranger stole three horses from Jones's pasture. Upon recounting the event, W. C. stated the man had "an honest countenance, but that is now known to be the only honest thing about him."³⁷

Later in the summer of 1885, Jones displayed his horticultural talents, supplemented nicely by favorable weather, by presenting his crops in San Angelo. On one of his frequent trips into the dusty county seat, W. C. brought a box of peaches he had grown at his South Concho farm. According to the *Standard*, the collection of fruit contained "the finest peaches ever raised in Texas. The largest of them weighed 8 ounces and measured 10 inches in circumference, while the majority of them weighed no less than 6 ounces. The flavor was all that could be desired."³⁸ The commotion caused by the enormous peaches led some to

³⁴*San Angelo Standard*, May 2, 1885.

³⁵*San Angelo Standard*, May 30, 1885.

³⁶*San Angelo Standard*, July 11, 1885.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸*San Angelo Standard*, August 1, 1885.

believe the San Angelo area might overtake Georgia in renown for the fuzzy fruit. Jones also produced "excellent crops" of oats and wheat, stating he "irrigated only once this year."³⁹

W. C. continued to gain prominence in the Concho Valley as evidenced by his visibility in the local newspaper. In August of 1885, Tom Green County Judge James Neill published his list of appointments for school trustees for the year. Neill named Jones as a trustee for District Number 12 in Vienna, a small community three miles south of Jones' home.⁴⁰ Jones received mention on the value of his property in the list of wealthy landowners of Tom Green County. Of course, railroads and non-resident stock and land corporations boasted the most valuable taxable property in the county. Of actual residents, W. C. Jones ranked among the wealthiest with \$12,700, though that sum did not take into account his enormous debt.⁴¹

While W. C. worked to make a name for himself both agriculturally and within Tom Green County society that autumn, Margaret journeyed north to visit some of her family in Wisconsin. Margaret returned in October 1885 with her brother John Currie of Lodi, Columbia County, Wisconsin. While visiting, Margaret discussed the wide-open opportunities in the Concho Valley with her brother, for upon his arrival he discussed the possibility of investing in "land or stock in this country."⁴² Of W. C.'s siblings, only his sister Jane had made the journey to Texas and remained, but prior to John Currie's arrival,

³⁹*San Angelo Standard*, October 10, 1885.

⁴⁰*San Angelo Standard*, August 22, 1885.

⁴¹*San Angelo Standard*, September 5, 1885.

⁴²*San Angelo Standard*, October 24, 1885.

Margaret already had many siblings in the region. This presented John Currie with the same pull to relocate to Tom Green County that the Joneses felt seven years earlier.

The short hiatus W. C. took from trading tracts of land ended in 1886. Jones had tied too much money up in promissory notes on his earlier large land deals. A combination of situations that occurred during 1886 point to this conclusion. In February, Jones sold two sections of land to the Berrendo Stock Company, the organization that owned what would later become known the Head of the River Ranch. These sections were just west of Antelope Creek in Block 24 of the Houston and Texas Central Railroad land. Berrendo agreed to pay Jones \$950 and to assume responsibility for four promissory notes for \$640 each.⁴³ The transaction cleared up a significant amount of debt held by Jones on land isolated from his main ranching operation. While one can easily see how this relatively minor transaction would work in W. C.'s favor, his other land sale in 1886 is less understandable.

On July 30, 1886, W. C. contracted to sell 3,405 acres of prime land on the South Concho River to T. M. Blakemore of Taylor County and J. H. Routh of Runnels County. Blakemore and Routh agreed to pay Jones \$18,500 for the several surveys. The deal included the James Eldridge Survey Number 73—the future location of Christoval—and surrounding properties on both sides of the South Concho River. The terms of payment included \$1,000 cash up front, \$5,000 due on or before January 1, 1887, and three promissory notes that covered the remaining \$12,500 over the course of following three years. Blakemore and Routh explicitly included a clause in the contract that ensured Jones

⁴³Tom Green County Deed Records, Book Q, 83.

delivered "good and sufficient deed and title for the property aforesaid with the exception of the Vendor's Lien hereinbefore mentioned" otherwise the agreement would become void.⁴⁴

The fact that James Eldridge, Jr. from Bosque County, Texas, had filed suit against W. C. Jones for possession of Survey Number 73 necessitated the inclusion of the warranty of title in the deed Blakemore and Routh signed. None of the other land deals W. C. made up to that point included a warranty. Interestingly, Eldridge filed the suit on July 2, 1886—weeks before W. C. signed the deal to sell the property. Aside from seeking to avoid a lengthy legal battle, Jones had no good reason to sell. Jones had proven successful in his agricultural endeavors up to that point, and on the very lands included in Blakemore and Routh deal.

Eldridge, upon filing the suit, expounded on how he came to possess title for Survey 73. His father, James Eldridge, Sr., hailed from Tennessee. On April 21, 1836, James Eldridge, Sr. fought as a volunteer under General Samuel Houston at the Battle of San Jacinto. In return for that service, the newly created Republic of Texas presented Eldridge with a grant for 640 acres on November 2, 1838. Eight years later, the Bexar County Surveyor conveyed to Eldridge Survey 73 in what was then Section 14 of Bexar County. James Eldridge, Sr. lived the rest of his life in Memphis, Tennessee, where he died in September 1874.⁴⁵ In fact, Eldridge's entire family died within about five days of each other as a result of an outbreak of yellow fever that had just the year before claimed over two

⁴⁴Tom Green County Deed Records, Book S, 188.

⁴⁵Texas General Land Office, Bexar Donation to James Eldridge. Accessed August 14, 2013. http://www.glo.texas.gov/ncu/SCANDOCS/archives_webfiles/arcmaps/webfiles/landgrants/PDFs/1/5/4/154076.pdf

thousand victims and would ravage Memphis for the remainder of the decade.⁴⁶ The only survivor out of the family—including six children—was the sixteen-year-old James Eldridge, Jr. At the age of twenty-eight, Eldridge, Jr. went to find the "Texas lands" about which his father used to speak.⁴⁷

In the suit, Eldridge argued Jones had "held and exclusively possessed the said premises for two years next preceding the filing of this suit and has so used and occupied the same."⁴⁸ Eldridge suggested Jones owed him rent for those two years of use at the rate of \$100 per year in addition to damages of \$2,500. Unfortunately, Tom Green County execution dockets from the period do not include the exact disposition of the case. W. C., however, did strike a deal with Eldridge on January 4, 1887, showing Eldridge won back the rights to the land in question. Jones paid Eldridge \$300 cash and assumed nine promissory notes, six for \$91.66 and three for \$183.33 at ten percent interest all due by July 1, 1889.⁴⁹

Although W. C. managed to retain rights to Survey 73, the vendor's lien Eldridge held on the property until the summer of 1889 prevented Jones from satisfying the terms of the Blakemore and Routh agreement. Unable to produce clear title for the lands in question, W. C. found himself embroiled in another lawsuit. The particulars of this case were more nuanced than the Eldridge matter, thus it made its way up to the Texas Supreme Court. Blakemore and Routh gave W. C. \$1,000 cash in addition to signing numerous promissory

⁴⁶ Gerald M. Capers, Jr., "Yellow Fever in Memphis in the 1870's," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 24, no. 4 (March 1938): 484.

⁴⁷Tom Green County Civil Case 296, Eldridge v Jones. James E. Eldridge disposition.

⁴⁸Ibid, Plaintiff's Original Petition

⁴⁹Tom Green County Deed Records, Book T, 383.

notes for the several sections of land. On July 30, 1886, Jones admitted he could not produce a clear title for Survey 73 so the three parties agreed to cancel the contract. W. C.'s lack of working capital prevented him from directly paying Blakemore and Routh the \$1,000 he owed them. In lieu of a direct payment, Blakemore and Routh agreed to accept the rent that one of Jones' tenants, Mr. Faires, owed him for 1886. If the resulting rent exceeded the amount owed to Blakemore and Routh, then Jones would receive the difference, otherwise Jones would be responsible for paying for the deficiency of the rent.⁵⁰

The problem lay in the fact that Jones and Faires had not agreed on the actual size of the land Faires rented. Jones, according to Blakemore and Routh, was responsible for obtaining a satisfactory survey of the property so Faires could apply the \$7 per acre rent toward Jones's debt. W. C. did not act quickly enough on this obligation so Blakemore and Routh filed the original suit in the District Court on March 26, 1888. That court ruled Jones owed the plaintiffs \$646.77. The judge gave Jones credit for the presumed amount of money Faires owed on the lease contract despite the fact Faires had not actually paid the money to the plaintiffs.⁵¹ Blakemore and Routh, in turn, appealed that decision, arguing Jones should be responsible for the full \$1,000. Ultimately the Supreme Court reversed the District Court's judgment and ruled Jones owed Blakemore and Routh \$1,000 plus ten percent interest starting July 30, 1886. The judge did credit Jones with a payment of \$199.90 on

⁵⁰Tom Green County Civil Court Case 440, *Blakemore & Routh v Jones*, Motion for rehearing No. 353.

⁵¹*Ibid*, Supreme Court of Texas, Austin Term, 1890.

August 31, 1897. The final judgment came down on January 27, 1894, forcing W. C. to pay a significant amount of interest in addition to the principal.⁵²

To compound his troubles in 1886, W. C. lost two pieces of property because he failed to pay the previous year's taxes. On April 6, 1886, M. Lasker attended the Tom Green County tax sale where he purchased Surveys 895 and 896, 320 acres total, for a bid of \$33.36. Taxes on each of the 160-acre properties amounted to \$14.06 for 1885. Jones had acquired the two surveys during a deal he made with J. H. Hill on August 7, 1884. Surveys 895 and 896, known as the Carl Zichen Surveys, abutted the west bank of the South Concho River.⁵³ The two properties were right in the middle of the area Jones had been building his farming and ranching operation but were not included in the attempted deal with Blakemore and Routh.

On December 20, 1886, in the midst of the litigation and general bad luck, Jones signed a contract for the only purchase of land he made that year. M. Lasker, the man who bought Jones's land on tax debt, owned Survey 1827, the tract of land immediately south of the Eldridge plot on the South Concho River. Lasker worked as a land agent in Galveston, Texas, so he contracted the deal through his attorney, Frank Lerch. In the deal, Jones paid Lasker \$200 cash and signed three promissory notes for the remaining \$1,200, which would be paid over the next two and one-half years.⁵⁴ Immediately upon finishing the deal, Jones

⁵² Ibid, Order to the Sheriff, January 27, 1894.

⁵³ Tom Green County Deed Records, Book S, 277.

⁵⁴ Tom Green County Deed Records, Book U, 86.

discovered his neighbor to the south, the Berrendo Stock Company, already claimed possession of the piece of property.

Jones filed suit against Berrendo on Christmas Eve to assert his title and remove the stock company from his newly acquired property. That day, Jones petitioned the court for a writ of sequestration to remove Berrendo from the contested land until the judge had made a decision. In order to obtain the writ, Jones had to promise to compensate Berrendo \$4,000 in the event the court ruled the stock company, in fact, held title to the property. Frank Lerch and Louis Farr acted as sureties for the \$4,000 agreement. Jones argued he had "been damaged in the sum of five hundred dollars by reason of his unlawful ejection from said premises by [the] defendant."⁵⁵ Additionally, W. C. wanted Berrendo to pay \$100 rent for the time the company had used the property. The case went to trial in January 1887 with Judge William Kennedy presiding. The Berrendo Stock Company initially plead not guilty to the charges leveled by Jones. However, the two litigants reached an agreement that acknowledged Jones' right to the land. Judge Kennedy accepted the agreement and awarded judgment for Jones.⁵⁶

Despite all of the lawsuits, W. C. Jones continued his work as a sheep raiser during 1886. In early February he placed an advertisement in the *Standard* stating he had lost 150 head of Vermont and California sheep, all bearing his brand, a letter "J" on the left side, and various earmarks. W. C. offered to "pay \$10 reward for information leading to their

⁵⁵Tom Green County Civil Court Case 339, W. C. Jones v Berrendo Stock Company, Petition of the Plaintiff.

⁵⁶Tom Green County Civil Court Book Number 1, November 1878-April 1890, 15.

recovery."⁵⁷ In addition to the unfortunate loss of those sheep, he also made two large purchases of sheep during the year. Jones bought 1,100 graded ewes from S. H. Riley in March 1886. The report admitted, "We could not learn the figures, but understand a good price was paid."⁵⁸ The livestock dealers, the Davidson Brothers, negotiated the other deal for sheep W. C. made in 1886. Jones purchased 335 head of the I. W. DeBoise Sheep in the late summer of 1886 at a dollar a head.⁵⁹ Just a month later, W. C. sold his 8,000-pound clip (10,000 pounds less than in 1885) at twenty and one-half cents per pound in the newly established railroad town of Ballinger, Texas.

The social calendar of the holiday season saw the Sandersons and the Jones children spending time with each other. In November of 1886, Miss Minnie Sanderson, the youngest daughter of Robert and Mary Sanderson traveled from San Angelo to the South Concho ranch to spend a few days with her aunt, uncle, and cousins.⁶⁰ Later in the year, "Miss Sadie, the accomplished daughter of W. C. Jones, of South Concho" went to San Angelo to spend several weeks with her cousin, Mrs. Sarah Millspaugh.⁶¹ The Joneses and the Sandersons maintained close relationships through constant trips to each other's homes for extended visits.

⁵⁷*San Angelo Standard*, February 13, 1886.

⁵⁸*San Angelo Standard*, March 20, 1886.

⁵⁹*San Angelo Standard*, September 11, 1886.

⁶⁰*San Angelo Standard*, November 6, 1886.

⁶¹*San Angelo Standard*, December 11, 1886.

With the lawsuits and strife behind him, W. C. Jones worked to improve the pasture that he tried to sell just a year earlier. In the spring of 1887, the *Standard* reported that both the Berrendo Stock Company and W. C. Jones were fencing off their pastures. This action by two of the larger landowners in the area meant "only one mile of water front [would] be left unfenced on the entire South Concho."⁶² Individuals who had previously relied on the open range to allow their herds sufficient room to forage were losing access to the vital lands they required. Furthermore, those who had acquired large tracts of land running along the waterways in the region had easy access to water for their animals without having to rely on windmills, thus Jones' rapid acquisition of land worked in his favor. Smaller landowners saw the number of livestock they could successfully run diminish as they lost access to open grasslands.⁶³

L. B. Harris built the first fence in Tom Green County in 1881, closing off 20,000 acres from the open range. Other large landowners like Charles B. Metcalfe and John R. Nasworthy followed Harris's lead. The fencing of property, however, received significant resistance resulting in widespread fence cutting and violence. The Texas legislature made fence cutting a felony in 1884, thus providing landowners with further incentive to close off their property. In this context, Jones may have been somewhat late in fencing his land in the spring of 1887, but he had just attempted to sell the property. As the open range gave way to enclosed pastures, stockmen could focus on raising particular breeds of cattle without the fear

⁶² *San Angelo Standard*, April 2, 1887.

⁶³ Henry D. McCallum and Frances T. McCallum, *The Wire that Fenced the West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1965), 167.

of contamination.⁶⁴ While stockmen were working to close their pastures, some in San Angelo sought to establish a new center for the wool industry in Texas.

In March 1887, W. W. Welsh and Jeff Moore from the Wool Executive Committee traveled to San Angelo to "present to the sheepmen of this and surrounding counties the advantages of San Angelo as a wool market and the inducements it offers."⁶⁵ Naturally, the woolgrowers in Tom Green County could not agree more with this sentiment. Multiple stockmen promised to patronize the potential buyer, should one set up in San Angelo—W. C. Jones included. Welsh estimated that the wool clip of those who had pledged would amount to 190,000 pounds. Additionally, they presumed once established, the market would have access to over half a million pounds of wool from the region.⁶⁶ Moore returned two weeks later with a second appraisal of the potential wool market in San Angelo. He stated, "The estimates are generally low and buyers can calculate on ONE MILLION POUNDS entering the gates of 'The Monarch of the Plains.'"⁶⁷ Moore listed W. C. Jones among those in the estimate with 3,600 head of sheep and an estimated clip of 16,200 pounds.

When the time came to market the wool, Moore's estimate of Jones' clip proved to be too high. W. C. sold 12,541 pounds of wool at the market that year, less than the over eight

⁶⁴John C. Henderson, "Tom Green County," *Handbook of Texas Online* (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/hct07>), accessed August 07, 2013; Holden, *Alkali Trails*, 50.

⁶⁵*San Angelo Standard*, April 2, 1887.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*

⁶⁷*San Angelo Standard*, April 16, 1887. Emphasis in the original.

tons predicted earlier in the year.⁶⁸ Jones did, however, sell and trade some of his sheep prior to the clip, contributing to his shortfall. In June W. C. "started a flock of 600 fat, shorn muttons from his ranch to Chicago."⁶⁹ Of the six hundred sheep that left for Chicago, 520 arrived safely a week later. The sheep averaged eighty-two pounds and sold at the rate of "\$3.75 per hundred."⁷⁰ Jones also traded one thousand head of picked ewes to William Evans for 314 of his stock cattle. Evans asked Jeff Moore to select the ewes who stated, "They are about as fine-looking sheep as he ever gazed on." The report continued, "This trade again reminds us that sheep are not looked on with quite so much contempt by cowmen as they used to be."⁷¹

A second transaction a few weeks after the trade with Evans indicated W. C. beginning to show interest in raising cattle in addition to sheep. In the final days of September 1887, C. D. Foote sold Jones three registered Durham Bulls for one hundred dollars each.⁷² At this time, Jones still actively raised sheep, but this transaction demonstrated his desire to diversify his stock holdings. While some agricultural businessmen chose to stay loyal to a particular market be it cattle, sheep, or some sort of farming, W. C. will have several major shifts in his primary source of income.

⁶⁸*San Angelo Standard*, October 29, 1887.

⁶⁹*San Angelo Standard*, June 11, 1887.

⁷⁰*San Angelo Standard*, June 25, 1887.

⁷¹*San Angelo Standard*, September 17, 1887.

⁷²*San Angelo Standard*, October 1, 1887.

Jones' adaptability becomes evident from the adventurous nature of his investments. He became a fast adopter of new technology and welcomed the opportunity to discuss the advantages the technology provided. For example, W. C. purchased a "16 foot Perkins windmill, piping, tanks, troughs, stroke-lengthener and the celebrated Jarecki cylinder for [a] 256 foot well" in 1887.⁷³ Although Daniel Halladay built the first American windmill in 1854, C. C. Doty of Schleicher County brought the first one to the region in 1882. Many of the larger stock operations in western Texas did not begin using the water pumping system until 1886 and 1887.⁷⁴

The Perkins windmill augmented Jones' access to water, making his stock raising operation less difficult. While a windmill created a reliable pool of water in an otherwise dry pasture of land with no access to surface water, the technology did not adapt well for irrigating farm land. This, again, underscores the importance of the land W. C. owned that abutted the river and streams in southern Tom Green County. His irrigated farmland allowed Jones to produce reliable crops that served to diversify his economic activity and supplement his income.⁷⁵

Jones maintained his sabbatical from land deals in 1888. In fact, the only recorded transfer that year occurred when W. C. had to make a deal with another heir from Bosque County, Texas, to secure a section of land he purchased from G. W. DeLong in the 1882

⁷³ *San Angelo Standard*, November 12, 1887.

⁷⁴ Daniel B. Wellborn, "Windmills," *Handbook of Texas Online* (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/aow01>), accessed August 21, 2013.

⁷⁵ Donald E. Green, *Land of the Underground Rain: Irrigation on the Texas High Plains, 1910-1970* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1973), 41-43.

transaction. The first situation required a lawsuit to resolve the ownership of the James Eldridge tract. This time, however, the claimant did not have to resort to litigation. Thomas F. Webb, only heir to James Webb, produced for W. C. documents showing he had a valid claim to Survey 77, which lay just north of the James Eldridge Survey. The situation, in fact, held remarkable similarity to the Eldridge case. James Webb received the grant from the Republic of Texas for his service during the Texas Revolution. Unlike Eldridge, Webb died during that service on March 27, 1836, at the Massacre of Goliad.⁷⁶ Perhaps the similarity to the Eldridge case led Jones to settle out of court. In February 1888, Thomas F. Webb, heir to James Webb agreed to a quit-claim for Survey 77 in the name of James Webb for \$668. Jones paid Webb two dollars cash and signed four promissory notes for \$166.50 each, with two due at the beginning of 1889 and two due at the beginning of 1890.⁷⁷

A journalist from the *Stockman* arrived on the South Concho on June 10, 1888, accompanied by his guide, C. D. Foote. The unnamed writer sought to learn more about the stockmen and farmers in Tom Green County, particularly about the efforts of ranchers to grow their own feed. After an unfortunate incident where the writer had to save his horse "from choking himself to death" at the McKinley Bros. ranch a few miles from Lipan creek, Mr. Foote guided the journalist to the Jones place.⁷⁸ Foote and the writer decided they would spend half of the day with Jones and the rest at the DeLong place down the river, but "Mr. J.

⁷⁶Texas General Land Office, Bexar Donation to James Webb. Accessed on August 21, 2013. http://www.glo.texas.gov/ncu/SCANDOCS/archives_webfiles/arcmaps/webfiles/landgrants/PDFs/1/5/4/154059.pdf

⁷⁷ Tom Green County Deed Records, Book X, 68-69.

⁷⁸*San Angelo Standard*, June 30, 1888.

proved to be one of those men whom it is hard to get away from, and we came near spending the day with him."⁷⁹ About the property, the author wrote:

Mr. Jones has a fine ranch of about 8500 acres, through which the South Concho runs, about 2500 acres, which he calls his home ranch, lying on the east side. He has a fine, irrigated farm of over 100 acres, and about another 100 acres on which the water can be run as soon as it can be cleared and broken. His pasture lands are somewhat hilly, but furnish good grazing and good winter protection, and he has the largest body of pecan timber I have yet seen. He tells me that his pecan crop alone brought over \$1000 last year. With all this irrigable land in forage crops, and the pasture well stocked with cattle, it would seem to me that a man ought to feel pretty well fixed.⁸⁰

The *Stockman* journalist mentioned Jones had not adequately taken to the idea of feed farming. To rectify that problem, he left W. C. with a copy of his newspaper and "hoped that he [would] 'catch on' in time."⁸¹

Oddly, the *Stockman* article did not mention W. C.'s wool operation at all. In 1888, Marion Robertson reported to the *Standard* the wool clip he received by the sheep raisers in Tom Green County. The total harvest for that year amounted to 383,203 pounds. Of that amount, W. C. produced just over fifteen thousand pounds, making him the fifth largest woolgrower in the county that year.⁸² Those numbers certainly suggest Jones still put significant effort toward raising sheep, despite the *Stockman* neglecting that sector of his operation in its publication.

⁷⁹*San Angelo Standard*, June 30, 1888.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸²*San Angelo Standard*, May 19, 1888.

Toward the end of 1888, Jones found himself again embroiled in a lawsuit over the James Eldridge Survey. On October 17, 1888, J. Jenkins and James M. Robertson filed suit against W. C. for defaulting on the promissory notes he signed to James Eldridge following the 1886 lawsuit. Jenkins and Robertson purchased the promissory notes, and Jones never made the first payment, which was due on July 1887. In fact, Jenkins and Robertson claimed that Jones "though often requested has never paid said sums of money but refuses so to do."⁸³ The presiding judge, upon hearing the arguments, ruled in favor of Jenkins and Robertson for \$597.97, which included the past due principal and interest from the promissory notes, a ten percent fee included in the note for attorney costs, and court costs including ten percent interest from the date of the suit's original filing.⁸⁴

W. C. felt the pressure mounting as Jenkins and Robertson urged him to produce the money he owed them. In an attempt to curtail the financial woes he experienced, Jones mortgaged 2,956 acres of his land to J. Gordon Brown out of Travis County, Texas. The deal included Jones' land from both the east and west banks of the South Concho: Carl Zichen, Albert Black, Johannes Zerbach, Heinrich Deidrich, Christopher Boeger, and James Eldridge surveys. Jones agreed to repay the eight thousand dollar loan he received for these sections of land by signing four promissory notes. The four notes were "payable on the First [of] May A.D. 1890, A.D. 1891, A.D. 1892, and A.D. 1894, respectively to J. Gordon Brown or order

⁸³Tom Green County Civil Court Case 476, Jenkins & Robertson v Jones, Petitioner's Complaint.

⁸⁴Ibid, Judgment.

of the First National Bank, in Austin, city aforesaid for the sums, in gold U.S. coin, one thousand, one thousand, one thousand, and five thousand dollars."⁸⁵

With the money from the mortgage in hand, Jones began to satisfy his earlier debts. On February 6, 1889, Jenkins and Robertson, joined by James Eldridge, released their claim on the property.⁸⁶ For the first time since he purchased the land from DeLong in 1882, W. C. had clear title to the Eldridge property, aside from the mortgage with Brown. The legal battles raged on for three years, and Jones understandably seemed reluctant to pay for the same piece of property multiple times. February 1889 saw Jones clearing debt for the other land issue with T. F. Webb. Jenkins and Robertson also represented Webb in his claim for the James Webb. A more amicable deal, Jones voluntarily agreed to buy Webb out of his interest in the property, and made the final payment a year earlier than scheduled.

With the constant litigation concerning the DeLong property finally behind him, W. C. concentrated on working his property rather than defending his claim to it. During 1889, Jones again extended his interests away from the wool industry. John H. Jones, W. C.'s brother from Kansas journeyed south with his family to visit his older brother and examine the place he had carved out for himself in the wilds of Texas.⁸⁷ John brought with him a purebred Clydesdale horse, which he sold his brother for one thousand dollars. Jones intended to use the two-year-old gargantuan horse for breeding purposes. The *Standard* republished a report from the *Enterprise* that Jones was "anxious to bet \$100 that it is the best

⁸⁵Tom Green County Deed of Trust, Book J, 68.

⁸⁶Tom Green County Deed Records, Book 2, 221.

⁸⁷*San Angelo Standard*, January 19, 1889.

Clyde in the county."⁸⁸ Apparently, Jones did not appreciate the liberty the newspaper took in reporting the offer of a wager, as the next week's issue stated, "W. C. Jones has a very fine horse, but says he does not propose to bet on him as was represented in the last issue of the *Enterprise*."⁸⁹ Other ranchers in the area must have owned fine Clydesdales who sought an easy one hundred-dollar profit.

The autumn of 1889 brought major changes in the Jones household. Jones' two oldest daughters, Sadie and Minnie, took vows of matrimony within two weeks of each other. Nineteen-year-old Minnie married Thomas E. Toole on Tuesday, August 27, 1889.⁹⁰ The report of the marriage said little about the ceremony aside from the fact that Reverend Bowman officiated and it was held at the home of W. C. and Margaret on the South Concho. Just weeks before the wedding, Toole partnered with R. J. Kimbrough, creating a firm named Toole & Kimbrough "for the transaction of land, loan and live stock agency business. They are both fine men and rustlers and will make themselves prominent in future deals in the Concho country."⁹¹

Two weeks later, on September 11, the eldest Jones sibling, Sadie, married James Weddell, a "sheep-ranchman on the North Concho."⁹² James, described as "that sturdy son

⁸⁸*San Angelo Standard*, January 26, 1889.

⁸⁹*San Angelo Standard*, February 2, 1889.

⁹⁰*San Angelo Standard*, August 31, 1889.

⁹¹*San Angelo Standard*, August 10, 1889.

⁹²*San Angelo Standard*, September 15, 1889.

of Caledonia," was born in Edinburgh, Scotland on July 23, 1854.⁹³ He immigrated to the United States around 1880. Weddell stopped in Missouri for a few months after leaving New York, but eventually made his way south to Texas where he homesteaded a section of land on the North Concho River. He met Sadie a year earlier while visiting the Jones ranch on a trip to purchase some sheep from W. C. Apparently smitten with Sadie, he visited her every two weeks for the year leading up to their marriage.⁹⁴

Again Reverend Bowman from the Presbyterian church of San Angelo presided over the ceremony. A witness described Sadie as "looking her best and arrayed in spotless white." Meanwhile, James had a slight case of cold feet. A friend assured him that "standing up to be married is not near so bad as hanging," but the groom "stood the ordeal like a martyr, while the bride evidently considered it as the requisite step and entrance into the New Jerusalem that we hear about." Following the exchange of vows, the newly married couple with their family and friends enjoyed a turkey dinner whose "general arrangement, art and abundance of the spread was such as to particularly incite to pleasurable comments." Attorney Frank Lerch made "closing remarks conveying to the bride and groom, on behalf of the company and himself, their best wishes."⁹⁵

After the feast and celebration, the family traveled the twenty miles from Christoval to San Angelo in a caravan of "several carriages and buggies."⁹⁶ The group sought to see

⁹³ Ibid; Sadie Jones Weddell, interviewed by Sadie Weddell Puckitt.

⁹⁴ Sadie Jones Weddell, interviewed by Sadie Weddell Puckitt.

⁹⁵ *San Angelo Standard*, September 15, 1889.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

James and Sadie as they departed on the ten o'clock train from the Santa Fe station on their six-week long honeymoon tour. Their extended tour of the Midwest included stops in Chicago, Grand Rapids, St. Louis, Kansas City, and Milwaukee.⁹⁷

W. C. also had to contend with changes outside of his family during 1889. Tom Green County continued to grow. To help facilitate better transportation in the area, the county began constructing numerous roads leading to its borders. On February 12, the commissioner's court determined "that a new road be laid out and established from the North Gate of C. D. Foote's pasture on the South Concho Road to the South County line via Doty's Store on Delong's farm, crossing [the] South Concho River at or near Delong's dam."⁹⁸ The road would inevitably run through Jones's property on its southward journey.

On August 13, 1889, W. C. Jones filed a formal protest against the construction of the proposed road. While the minutes recorded from the meeting do not report his exact reasoning behind his opposition, considering the county would carve the road from his property, W. C. took issue with a public path partially restricting his access to the river. The commissioners' court rejected his argument and went forth in establishing the third class road declaring "that it be opened as such as soon as the settlement of damages by the committee be made."⁹⁹ In this case, Jones attempted unsuccessfully to alter the expansion of the transportation infrastructure of the county, but he would devise a way to take advantage of the new thoroughfare.

⁹⁷Sadie Jones Weddell, interviewed by Sadie Weddell Puckitt.

⁹⁸Tom Green County Commissioner's Court Minutes, Book 3, 147.

⁹⁹Tom Green County Commissioner's Court Minutes, Book 3, 194.

As 1889 drew to a close, the residents of Tom Green County prepared to witness the spectacular murder trial of James William Taggart. The county summoned W. C. Jones to be a juror for this trial. The state charged Taggart with the murder of his brother-in-law, Thomas Vermillion. On the night of May 10, 1889, Thomas arrived at his home thoroughly intoxicated and began verbally berating his stepmother and siblings. His stepmother, Malinda Vermillion, feared her husband would be unable to control his son during his drunken rage. Malinda sent for her grown son, James, who lived and worked with his uncle, to come help defuse the volatile situation.¹⁰⁰

Upon arriving at James' home, his cousin Frank explained, "Tom Vermillion is over at your ma's calling them all sons of bitches and swore he was going to kill every damned one on the place."¹⁰¹ James rushed over to defend his mother at the home of his stepfather. When he arrived, James confronted Tom to get him to desist. Instead of calming down, Tom revealed a straight razor that he always carried and began slashing at James. After realizing James had a pistol in his pocket, Tom yelled, "pull out your pop gun and I will cut your damn'd heart out!"¹⁰² Soon after that comment, James pulled out his pistol and shot Tom one time, killing him instantly.

The trial for this act of domestic violence began just a few months later. On November 16, 1889, The *Standard* published the list of jurors, which included many prominent men from around Tom Green County: C. D. Foote, P. S. Head, S. J. Delong, H.

¹⁰⁰Tom Green County Criminal Case 845, State of Texas v. J. W. Taggart, Testimony of Melinda Vermillion.

¹⁰¹Ibid, Testimony of J. W. Taggart.

¹⁰²Ibid, Testimony of Melinda Vermillion.

Haglestein, Frank Lerch, and W. C. Jones, to appear at the courthouse on November 25.¹⁰³

On the day of the trial, however, Jones failed to make an appearance. The sheriff sent a man out to his home on the South Concho River to compel him to fulfill his civic duty, but the deputy reported he could not find Jones. By the middle of December, the mystery of Jones' failure to appear had been publicly announced, "W. C. Jones, of the South Concho, was in hard luck last week. He lost 300 head of sheep and while hunting them failed to come to court and was fined \$50 for contempt. He has not found his sheep yet and anyone seeing sheep wool branded J will confer a favor by notifying him."¹⁰⁴ Although suffering from a streak of misfortune, W. C. and Margaret Jones managed to host "a magnificent Xmas dinner" for their family and friends, including the newlyweds, James and Sadie Weddell.¹⁰⁵

W. C. Jones ended the decade of the 1880s having fully established himself in the fabric of Tom Green County society. He had become a public figure whose name often appeared in the pages of the local newspapers. The management of his property and business endeavors had become the talk of the community, much like other wealthy ranchers and merchants. These men served as a standard by which younger and less wealthy citizens would measure themselves—a living embodiment of what many regarded as the opportunity available in the West. With his two eldest daughters married to successful men and his two sons rapidly approaching manhood—in 1890 Robert turned eighteen and Will turned seventeen—Jones saw the future of his family looking as promising as ever.

¹⁰³*San Angelo Standard*, November 16, 1889.

¹⁰⁴*San Angelo Standard*, December 14, 1889.

¹⁰⁵*San Angelo Standard*, January 11, 1890.

His quick accumulation of land came at a price, however. During the 1880s, Jones had to juggle numerous debts and refinance his lands to avoid bankruptcy in addition to fighting legal battles to retain the land he had purchased. Though immersed in debt, Jones solidified his lifelong habit of diversifying his economic activity and adopting technology to assist in his endeavors. Although he still operated primarily as a sheep raiser, Jones found additional sources of revenue by farming his irrigated fields. Within a few years, W. C. would soon see reasons to abandon sheep for more lucrative pastures.

CHAPTER III

AN EXPERIMENT IN TOWN-BUILDING

From 1885 until the end of the decade, Jones mostly refrained from buying and selling land. While he made a few transactions, he seemed to be pleased with the thousands of acres he had acquired and worked to improve those rather than purchase more. The quickness with which he had accumulated debt played a role in that decision. Jones faced numerous lawsuits and nearly forfeited property during his first twelve years in the county. However, W. C.'s restraint from the last five years showed dividends by 1890. As a consequence of his relative frugality, his financial situation improved, allowing him to explore new avenues for creating wealth.

Tragedy, however, struck the family soon after the new decade dawned. On January 20, just five months after his marriage to Minnie Jones, Thomas E. Toole died from typhoid fever. The twenty-six-year-old man passed at 6:45 in the evening in the Hotel San Angelo.¹ The horror of this sudden illness shocked his twenty-year-old widow. Further complicating the matter, Minnie was about five months pregnant with their first child when Thomas died. Minnie's parents stood by to support her during her pregnancy and grieving. A strong bond with her sister Sadie would also prove invaluable during this troubling period.

While supporting his daughter through the loss of her husband, W. C. continued plying his trade. The new year witnessed Jones thinning his stock of sheep. Late in February 1890, W. C. "sold 1000 stock sheep to Messrs Green and Maxwell, new comers down on the

¹*San Angelo Standard*, January 25, 1890.

Devil's River, for \$3 per head, immediate delivery."² In a much larger transaction later in the year, Jones sold to R. F. Bostick 1,400 head of sheep and a ranch on the Bois D'Arc Draw in southern Tom Green County. Bostick paid Jones \$5,100 for the stock and land including all improvements.³

While he sold off his sheep, W. C. sought to purchase one hundred hogs to bolster his stores of meats and supplement his income. More importantly, however, Jones continued to build his reputation as a dealer of fine horses. In March the *Standard* announced, "W. C. Jones has bought Sowell Bros'. fine Cleveland Bay stallion for \$1200; also 30 head of mares from the Bill Ambler estate for \$13.25 per head. Mr. Jones wants to buy 50 more head of good mares."⁴ The stallion, which Jones named Prince Albert, had a bit of a wild streak. One day that spring, while Jones proudly rode on his prized steed, the horse yanked his unsuspecting owner off his saddle with a flick of his powerful neck, giving Jones a black eye. After describing the accident, the South Concho correspondent who went by the moniker Prodigal Son betrayed the prevalent sexism of the nineteenth century by stating, "Some don't seem to understand how a horse could give a man a black eye, but all married men *sabe* how a woman can give a fellow a dark eye."⁵

Just a few months after buying his Cleveland Bay, Jones placed an advertisement offering stud services from both his new stallion and the fine Clydesdale he had purchased a

²*San Angelo Standard*, March 1, 1890.

³*San Angelo Standard*, October 25, 1890.

⁴*San Angelo Standard*, March 29, 1890.

⁵*San Angelo Standard*, March 22, 1890. *Sabe* is the Spanish word for "know"

year earlier. Jones boasted, "I have a Thoroughbred Cleveland Bay stallion that weights 1,355 lbs, and travels in 3.50, a perfect picture of a horse and with some of the finest blood in his veins that there is on this continent."⁶ He did not speak quite as highly about the Clydesdale but suggested he was "a good horse in any country."⁷ In an attempt to "introduce such blood into the county and advertise this stock," Jones offered, for fifteen dollars, to let his studs impregnate local mares. In lieu of the fee, W. C. would "take trade in cattle, horses, or other stock."⁸ The conspicuous absence of sheep in the trade offer further suggests the fact that Jones had begun to shift his focus away from the wool industry.

Though the notorious tariff that affected the wool industry still lay four years in the future, many sheep raisers had developed some anxiety about the future of the wool market. By 1885, improvements in the quality of sheep bred in the United States resulted in fleece produced by individual sheep that weighed double what it did fifteen years earlier. Ultimately, the improved quality of the wool sheered led to a glut of wool on the market, which drove down prices. During the same period, wool importers utilized a loophole in the tariff system, which further added to the pricing problem for the domestic market. Foreign producers circumvented the higher tariff schedules by importing wool at the carpet wool rate without regard to the quality of the product. Because of this, the classification scheme

⁶*San Angelo Standard*, May 3, 1890.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

proved too ambiguous, allowing importers to manipulate the system to their benefit and domestic growers' chagrin.⁹

Jones' subtle drift away from sheep corresponded to a nation-wide reaction to the weakened market. Each year from 1884 to 1889 the number of sheep in the country decreased. The largest drop in sheep came in 1887 with Americans owning 7.39% fewer animals than the year before. During the five-year span, the sheep population fell by 15.91%. While the number of sheep decreased over that period, the value of each animal dropped. From 1884 to 1886, the average price per head of sheep fell from \$2.37 to \$1.91, representing a loss of 19.2% in value over two years. While the price recovered somewhat, by the end of the decade sheep raisers saw the average price per animal still ten percent below the price fetched in 1884.¹⁰ Jones sensed the uncertainty to come and looked to more secure financial opportunities.

The practice of breeding horses had, by 1890, taken off as a quite popular venture nationwide. This tendency worked to modify the general characteristics of horses across the country, producing a larger average size for horses that better suited farm work and freighting.¹¹ Jones' choice of utilizing the Cleveland Bay and Clydesdale—both large working horses—for breeding reflected this trend. Another, more troubling effect of the additional horse breeding meant the price of horses began to decline significantly. Nationally, the average price of a horse had dropped to \$68.84 in 1890 from \$71.89 just a

⁹United States Department of Agriculture, *First Report of the Secretary of Agriculture, 1889*. (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1889), 245.

¹⁰Ibid, 244.

¹¹Ibid, 232.

year earlier. Despite the increased number of horses in the country, the aggregate value of horses decreased by \$3,678,265 during the same period. Meanwhile, the average price of horses in Texas stood at \$32.97, less than half the national average. In fact, the only place in the United States that registered a lower average price for horses in 1890 was the New Mexico Territory.¹² Jones' choice to breed high-quality studs allowed him to circumvent the saturated horse market while working to increase the quality of the stock in the region, providing a layer of security not available in the wool market.

The final recorded livestock transaction of 1890 occurred just two days after Thanksgiving. A large shipment of graded Hereford cattle arrived from Williamson County, Texas, just north of Austin. The auction took place at Miles' stables with about fifty stockmen in attendance and, according to the *Standard*, "The bidding was spirited. John R. Nasworthy, the silvery tongued auctioneer, did the talking for Mr. Bland and did it well."¹³ At the auction, W. C. bought twenty-three head of two-year-old heifers at eleven dollars per head. The newspaper account stated, "Considering the grade of the cattle the prices were fair, and this sale will introduce the Hereford strain into the country without any fear of fever. San Angelo is fast becoming a fine stock center."¹⁴ The "fever" constituted a significant fear amongst stockmen in the southern United States. Known as Texas Fever, the disease spread between animals through the cattle tick. Because the parasite required at least two hundred frost-free days, the disease thrived in the South. Cattle drives from Texas to states in the

¹²Ibid, 235.

¹³*San Angelo Standard*, December 6, 1890.

¹⁴Ibid.

Central Plains introduced the affliction to northern herds, creating the desire to quarantine cattle from Texas. Introducing stock guaranteed to be free of the dreaded disease served as a major selling point for ranchers in Tom Green County.¹⁵

The first year of the new decade also saw Jones "building a large 14 room frame house on his fine farm on the South Concho, and [he] will soon have the finest establishment on the river," according to the *Standard*.¹⁶ The large house took the rancher just over a month to build, testifying to the considerable resources he put into its construction. Not long after he began building the home, W. C. drilled a well that produced "a fine flow of water at his new residence."¹⁷ In addition to the mansion he built from the ground up, Jones bought the "Silliman house and will move it up near the road, opposite his house and build a two story addition to it, when completed it will be the neatest residence in town." He intended to have a complex of residences on his property, either to allow his family the opportunity to live nearby or to provide rental housing for individuals assisting Jones in working the land.

As the South Concho Road, whose construction W. C. protested a year ago, found its way toward the Schleicher County line, Jones created an economic opportunity from his initial defeat. On December 13, 1890, W. C. announced in the *Standard* that he had "laid off a new town site, and has same cut up into lots and block with wide streets and alleys."¹⁸ The new site sat one and one-fourth miles from the current post office on the James Eldridge

¹⁵Claire Strom, "Texas Fever and the Dispossession of the Southern Yeoman Farmer," *Southern Historical Association* 66, no. 1 (February 2000): 52-53.

¹⁶*San Angelo Standard*, April 19, 1890.

¹⁷*San Angelo Standard*, May 17, 1890.

¹⁸*San Angelo Standard*, December 13, 1890.

Survey of land—the same tract that he fought several lawsuits to keep. Christopher Columbus Doty, two years prior, established the post office under the name Christoval. In fact, the original application for the post office, dated October 26, 1888, listed the proposed name of the location as Delong.¹⁹ While completing the application, Doty marked out Delong and wrote Christoval in its place. Popular history of Christoval tells of C. C. Doty actually petitioning to have the post office called "Christobal," which is Spanish for Christopher, but the post office department misunderstood the name.²⁰ The application, however, does not support that story.

Jones intended to build a village that would capitalize on the proximity of the Christoval post office. By the time he proposed his town of Christoval to the people of San Angelo, he had already constructed a "\$500 school house, a \$1,000 church and several nice residences."²¹ W. C. suggested to potential residents that his town had "a splendid opening here for a good general store carrying a \$10,000 stock."²² To further stimulate the desire to move to Christoval, Jones offered a free lot to any person who would put two hundred dollars' worth of improvements on the tract. That inducement began on January 1, 1891, and lasted for a full ninety days. Jones closed his advertisement by stating, "Ranchmen in that section with wives and families that care for the blessing of the church, society, and school

¹⁹Christoval Post Office Application, October 26, 1888, Record of Appointment of Postmasters, 1831-September 30, 1971, M841, Roll 127.

²⁰ "McMillan, "Christoval," 1.

²¹*San Angelo Standard*, December 13, 1890.

²² Ibid.

should not fail to take advantage of this opportunity."²³ During that year, Jones sold a single lot from his new town of Christoval. W. G. Leonard purchased one and one-quarter acres in the village for the sum of fifty dollars.²⁴

The first weekend of February 1891, "a large force of men were [*sic*] at work...cleaning off the church lot and opening Church street." The area immediately surrounding the new church would become town lots for Christoval. While the men labored at clearing the street, "a large number of our worthy women were there also, who were busily engaged in polishing the window lights and encouraging the men to work by telling them of the good things that would be set before them at noon."²⁵ Just a week before, W. C. officially donated a tract of land to the elders of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church at Christoval, D. Q. McCarty, J. L. Cochran, and S. H. Shipley and their successors.²⁶ The community of Christoval began to take shape with the establishment of the house of worship.

By carving a population center out of his land, Jones worked to alleviate a problem that individuals on the frontier faced while concurrently capitalizing on his solution. The South Concho region operated as an agricultural community, with families necessarily spread out over a large area to accommodate for the size of ranches and farms. The lack of a nearby community that could provide a public space for the people of the area to congregate for social functions augmented this relative isolation. San Angelo served as a transportation and

²³Ibid.

²⁴Tom Green County Deed Records, Book 7, 234.

²⁵*San Angelo Standard*, February 14, 1891.

²⁶Tom Green County Deed Records, Book Z, 623.

commercial hub, but, at twenty miles away, stood too distant to operate as a social hub. Jones' village fulfilled a need experienced by those who felt the seclusion of an agricultural based lifestyle and provided a base for the community to conquer the various problems faced on the frontier, including banditry and controlling predators that preyed on their livestock.²⁷

To foster a sense of community and help finance the construction of the church, the Joneses hosted a Valentine's Day party at their large home. The women who attended the party placed their names on slips of paper inside a large cowboy hat. For a small donation of twenty-five cents, the men in the group earned the chance to select one of the names. The woman whose name the man drew would be his partner at the dinner table. After dinner, the partygoers each gave another quarter upon leaving the table. The hosts sold slices of cake at ten cents apiece, but the dessert contained several nickels and dimes, allowing the patrons the chance to win back their money. Another "very fine large cake was sold at 25 cents per chance. Mr. Hood Murchison was the lucky man."²⁸

Following the victuals, D. Q. McCarty took out the box that contained all of the valentines. McCarty read each of the private notes aloud then proceeded to hand the message to its owner. This process caused some intense laughter and a bit of embarrassment. Mr. Holman provided some wonderful violin music while "little Fred Lowe kept time to the music by dancing."²⁹ The revelers "never saw a crowd that seemed to enjoy themselves better, and if Mr. Jones' house had not been on a solid foundation, it certainly would have

²⁷ Don Harrison Doyle, "Social Theory and New Communities in Nineteenth-Century America," *Western Historical Quarterly* 8, no. 2 (April 1977): 152.

²⁸ *San Angelo Standard*, February 21, 1891.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

fallen."³⁰ The successful evening ended at around midnight, having realized forty dollars to benefit the Christoval church.

Jones devoted significant time and resources to have the nascent town of Christoval become a success. On his frequent trips to San Angelo, the consummate salesman touted the strengths of the community and the South Concho culture. In late February he told the residents of San Angelo that he had been "selling lots and land like hot cakes in and around his new town on [the] South Concho."³¹ That may have been a bit of an exaggeration, though. By that time, W. C. had only registered the sale of one town lot, and that took place nearly six months earlier. He had, of course, donated the land for the church. However, Jones' boastfulness about Christoval would soon become a reality.

W. C.'s attempts to promote his fledgling town followed a strong tradition of boosterism in western Texas during the waning years of the nineteenth century. Historian David L. Caffey acknowledges two distinct sources of boosterism, local promoters and railroads. Of the two, Caffey argues local promoters have a more short-term view in mind, hoping to unload lots quickly without consideration of the future fate of the land. Conversely, railroads needed to create markets for transportation all along their routes, thus desired attracting long-term settlers to populate their towns. Jones' brand of boosterism fell squarely between these two options. He sought to make considerable amounts of money from selling land in Christoval. However, since W. C. built the community around his home,

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ *San Angelo Standard*, February 28, 1891.

he had a stake in cultivating a positive atmosphere since his customers became his neighbors.³²

The location and function of the new community also shaped the sort of promotion Jones employed. Rather than populating Christoval with individuals from far away regions who would be unaware of local conditions, Jones sought to siphon population from the rural area surrounding his land and the more urban San Angelo. Both of these groups would fully understand the temperature, rainfall patterns, and condition of the soil—all commonly exaggerated subjects in booster literature.³³ Instead of trying to dupe potential residents, Jones attempted to instill a sense of urgency by implying high demand and relative scarcity of lots.

By late spring Jones would part with another lot, a one-acre section of land deeded to Ben White located close to the Christoval stage stand.³⁴ This piece of land lay immediately adjacent to the Leonard property. White bought his acre on June 10, 1891. The sale to White represented the second such transaction since September of the previous year. The same day that W. C. sold the tract to White; he made another, more macabre sale. J. C. Norris approached Jones about purchasing a single gravesite. The "plat of ground 10 by 14 feet [was] to include the grave of Norris and one foot on the outside of the railing said grave,

³² David L. Caffey, "We Have the Land; Now for the People: Boosterism in Frontier West Texas, *The Permian Historical Annual* 21 (1981): 55.

³³ Ibid, 52-53.

³⁴ *San Angelo Standard*, May 16, 1891.

said piece of ground is a part of survey no. 75 in the name of Albert Black."³⁵ The Albert Black survey lay just north of the James Eldridge tract that included the town of Christoval.

In September, the "hot cakes" really began to sell. Indeed, during just a one-week period, Jones sold four pieces of property in and around his new village, effectively tripling the number of lots sold. The first two transactions from this flurry of sales went to Mrs. A. E. Evans. Evans, a widow, took a town lot containing one acre of land adjacent those sold to Leonard and White previously. Jones gave her a discount on the town lot, only charging her twenty dollars for the acre, because of another purchase she made that day.³⁶ For thirty dollars per acre, Evans bought a small farm carved out of the Albert Black survey. The \$1,050 agreement included an understanding that "water rights for irrigating purposes from the ditch running across the above described tract of land shall be divided equally in the proportion that the land under said ditch included."³⁷

The transaction between Jones and Mrs. Evans involved some bartering. Jones traded the small farm and town lot for a nearby full section of land called Survey 70 in the name of Charles A. Clark. The Clark survey lay southwest of the town of Christoval. In addition to the two tracts of land Jones transferred to Mrs. Evans, he assumed two promissory notes that belonged to her late husband, each worth \$520 and payable to Philip C. Lee. W. C. credited Mrs. Evans \$1,528 plus the promissory notes for \$1,040 for a total of \$2,568 for the 640

³⁵Tom Green County Deed Records, Book Z, 635.

³⁶Tom Green County Deed Records, Book 5, 595.

³⁷Tom Green County Deed Records, Book 5, 596.

acres in the Charles Clark survey. After the transfer of the two pieces of land to Mrs. Evans, Jones actually paid her \$458 cash plus the assumption of the debt.³⁸

Mrs. Evans' son, S. A. Evans, purchased the third piece of property that Jones sold during that week. The transaction included twenty-five acres adjacent to the thirty-five acre farm his mother bought. Jones sold the property for the same price—thirty dollars per acre—as the other Evans farm. Payment in this deal involved \$350 cash up front and two promissory notes for the remaining \$400. The Evans family now had sixty acres of irrigated farmland near the growing community in which they had acquired a lot for a house, allowing them to retain ties to Christoval while producing agricultural products for the market.

The final of the four sales from that busy week would prove to be an important one for the town. John Jones (no relation to W. C.) bought one and one-quarter acres from W. C. for fifty dollars. John came to answer the call that W. C. made in the newspaper about his new town needing a general goods store.³⁹ The new resident, in addition to establishing a general store decided to apply to the federal government to move the Christoval Post Office. The application, dated August 20, 1891, sought to move the institution one and one-half miles south. By transferring the post office to his property, John Jones provided an additional level of convenience and legitimacy to the new municipality as well as an additional draw for community members to visit his general store. One line of the application asks the potential postmaster to state the number of inhabitants if the office is to be located in a village. John Jones admitted that there were "only 10 at present [with] more

³⁸Tom Green County Deed Records, Book 6, 303-4.

³⁹*San Angelo Standard*, November 30, 1895.

building houses."⁴⁰ The new post office, which would operate out of John's store, also took advantage of the San Angelo to Sonora Road, completely bypassing the Knickerbocker community to the west.

Although shifting toward horses, cattle, and real estate, Jones had not abandoned the wool industry. In July of 1891, Jones took a trip to Sutton County to look after sheep he had pastured near the Devil's River, stopping for some amount of time in the town of Sonora. Jones' eldest son, Robert, who turned nineteen just a few months prior, accompanied him. This trip marked the first recorded incident of one of W. C.'s sons participating in the family business.⁴¹ With the unfortunate passing of Thomas Toole, Minnie lived at the Jones home with her infant son. The final step of bringing the family back together in the South Concho Region occurred when James and Sadie Weddell, who had been living in the Water Valley area on the North Concho River, bought 770 acres of land from W. C. for \$3,371.⁴² After purchasing that tract of land that lay on the west bank of the Concho River, the Weddells moved to the property and James began to do some work with W. C. in the livestock business.⁴³

The district court opened the fall 1891 session in November, and with it came two lawsuits involving W. C. In the first suit, Jones complained about unnecessary endangerment of a herd of his horses by the nearby Berrendo Stock Company. For three years, the

⁴⁰Christoval Post Office Application, August 20, 1891, Record of Appointment of Postmasters, 1831-September 30, 1971, M841, Roll 127.

⁴¹*San Angelo Standard*, July 25, 1891.

⁴²Tom Green County Deed Records, Book 7, 86.

⁴³Sadie Jones Weddell, interviewed by Sadie Weddell Puckitt.

Berrendo Stock Company had leased 1,900 acres of land from Jones. After the end of that agreement, Berrendo's manager, F. B. Ewing, notified W. C. that he would not need to renew the lease for the three sections of land. Jones told Ewing to keep the Berrendo fencing around the property to save money, and suggested that he would simply pasture some of his stock on the Berrendo pasture for no charge. Ewing, in a verbal agreement, stated that would be fine, and limited Jones to one head of livestock for every ten acres he owned in the Berrendo pasture—190 animals total.⁴⁴

According to Ewing, by the winter of 1890, Jones had overstocked the pasture by more than double the number of animals he had agreed to run. The Berrendo manager informed Jones of the problem, asking him to retrieve some of his livestock. In response, Jones sent his sons Robert and Will to help the Berrendo ranchers round up the horses. Nothing further happened at that time, but a few days later, without informing Jones or obtaining his consent, Ewing's foreman turned out several of Jones' horses. Of the approximately one hundred head of horses, thirteen were "wholly lost" including a \$250 racehorse, nine mares, and three colts.⁴⁵ When asked why he released the horses rather than the cattle Ewing replied they had "intended to round up the cattle and count them and find out exactly how many he had, but as it was winter we were afraid of damaging the cattle as it would take several days to gather and hold them."⁴⁶ Horses could be gathered far faster than the cattle, with less damage.

⁴⁴Tom Green County Civil Court Case 656, Jones v. Berrendo, Deposition of F. B. Ewing.

⁴⁵Ibid, W. C. Jones complaint.

⁴⁶Ibid, Deposition of F. B. Ewing.

By April of 1892, Jones decided to "no longer prosecute" Ewing and his men.⁴⁷ The court passed judgment against Berrendo, calling the company to pay \$338 to W. C. as compensation for the thirteen horses that had been lost when the stock company had thrown out the Jones horses. While Jones placed the value of his thirteen horses at \$750 total, the court ruled their value at only \$290. The court also awarded Jones \$48 to compensate for the money he paid laborers to round up the one hundred horses that had been released. A final stipulation stated the ownership of the lost thirteen horses passed to the Berrendo Stock Company, in the case of one or more being recovered at a future date.⁴⁸

In the other court case that fall, Jones served as the defendant. One of Jones' neighbors, C. D. Foote, purchased from Jones a "clyde or cross-breed stallion" for seven hundred dollars' worth of "stock and other valuables."⁴⁹ Foote bought the stallion exclusively for breeding purposes and claimed that Jones had represented the horse as "a good and efficient server of mares, that he was a good calf-getter and his foaling of mares was good and certain and that he was a good breeder."⁵⁰ From the moment he bought the horse, Foote argued, he had been "worthless as a breeder."⁵¹ Making matters worse, the horse suffered from recurrent airway obstruction, otherwise known as being wind broken—a

⁴⁷Ibid, Judgment.

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹Tom Green County Civil Court Case, Foote v. Jones 695, C. D. Foote's complaint.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

condition Jones allegedly guaranteed against. For this reason, Foote determined the horse held no value whatsoever.

Jones brought to his defense the testimony of Ben Sowell, a twenty-two-year-old horse trader from whom Jones had purchased the stallion. Sowell stated he sold Jones the stallion, which Sowell clarified was a bay horse, in March 1890. The five-year-old horse, according to Sowell, did not display any sort of physical defect nor was he wind broken. In fact, the same horse worked in a four-horse team that drove from Taylor County to Irion County on several occasions with no problems. Additionally, the trader suggested he had bred the stallion "to about forty mares during the year 1888, and to about the same number during 1889."⁵² Sowell continued that during the two years he owned him, the horse "was as sure a foal-getter as I ever saw" and he still owned about a dozen of the stallion's offspring.⁵³

Through the process of continuances, the trial between Foote and Jones lasted sixteen months, with the final ruling coming in February 1893. Ultimately, the judge ruled in favor of Foote, though refused to award Foote the full \$700 he paid for the animal. The testimony of Sowell, though not entirely effective, softened the blow. The judge ordered Jones to reimburse Foote \$550 with six percent interest beginning from the date of the sale, March 25, 1891. Additionally, Jones had to cover the court costs, which over the course of three continuances spanning nearly a year and one-half reached a grand total of \$10.75.⁵⁴

⁵²Tom Green County Civil Court Case, Foote v. Jones 695, Deposition of Ben Sowell.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴Tom Green County Execution Docket, Book B, 71.

Jones began the year with another land deal, selling another one of his smaller, irrigated farms. G. W. Lane purchased fifty acres consisting of land from Survey 79 in the name of Elizabeth McGill and Survey 77 in the name of James Webb. Jones carved this tract from the two hundred acres that had been designated as a homestead for his family. For the land, he secured from Lane a series of three promissory notes, totaling \$2,140—working out to \$42 per acre.⁵⁵ In fact, just a few days later, Lane purchased a second, smaller piece of land adjacent to his original property, which extended his holdings to sixty acres. The smaller tract, consisting of ten acres, cost Lane another \$450.⁵⁶ These sales came at a time when Jones began advertising his "irrigated farming land on the South Concho in tracts to suit purchasers. Will take cattle, sheep, or horse in part payment and will also give three or four years' time on balance."⁵⁷ By the early 1890s, Jones began to push for the sale of smaller tracts of land, either town lots or small farms, as a way to generate significant income. Land he paid relatively small prices for ten years earlier had gained considerable value through both irrigation and the location of the new town of Christoval.

The spring of 1892 saw significant loss for both daughters of the Joneses. Minnie Toole, the unfortunate widowed daughter of W. C. and Margaret, experience yet another, more crushing loss. Her two-year-old son, Thomas, who shared his name with the father he had never met, died at the residence of W. C. Jones. The death occurred on May 15, 1892.⁵⁸

⁵⁵Tom Green County Deed Records, Book 5, 592.

⁵⁶Tom Green County Deed Records, Book 5, 593.

⁵⁷*San Angelo Standard*, May 8, 1892.

⁵⁸*San Angelo Standard*, May 21, 1892.

While Minnie attempted to cope with the second major death in her family in two years, her sister Sadie also lost a child. Sadie and James Weddell's daughter, Margaret Frances, born on March 6, 1892, died just three months later from infantile paralysis.⁵⁹ Sadie dealt with the loss of her daughter by herself, as her husband was away at work and W. C. had a summons to serve on the grand jury in San Angelo at the time.⁶⁰

Despite the loss of two grandchildren, W. C. stayed busy that summer by continuing to promote and sell land in and around Christoval. Rather than have a few large land holders, the life of the new town depended on numerous small farmers in the region, all contributing to the economic and social bases. A single family, no matter how much land they owned or how wealthy they were, could only consume so much. Town residents coupled with small farmers would ultimately provide the best scheme for growth. To achieve this growth, Jones promoted his town throughout the region. Of course, he had an economic incentive to do so. The James Eldridge Survey, which he purchased in 1882, originally cost him one dollar per acre for the entire section. Taking into account the quitclaim he purchased from James Eldridge, Jr. years later following his lawsuit, the cost of the 640 acres amounted to only \$3.20 per acre. To put the deal in perspective, that would be about \$80 per acre in 2012 dollars for riverfront property. By 1892, Jones sold quarter acre lots in Christoval, carved out of the James Eldridge Survey, for \$25, which works out to \$2,516 per acre in 2012 dollars. The establishment of the town produced a remarkable increase in the value of his land, not to mention the benefit of having a community grow up around his homestead.

⁵⁹*San Angelo Standard*, March 12, 1892.

⁶⁰Sadie Jones Weddell, interviewed by Sadie Weddell Puckitt.

The irrigated farms around Christoval also represented a fantastic source of profit for Jones. In addition to the James Eldridge Survey, Jones sold irrigated farms from the nearby James Webb and Albert Black surveys. The James Webb Survey, after W. C. bought the quitclaim from Webb's heir, cost Jones about two dollars per acre for the full section. The Albert Black Survey, one of the few sections W. C. purchased from G. W. Delong that did not involve a lawsuit, cost W. C. \$3.90 per acre. Again, Jones bought these tracts of land in the winter of 1882, just four years after he arrived in Tom Green County. For the two irrigated farms Jones sold to the Evans family, he charged \$30 per acre, while he received \$45 per acre in the transaction with G. W. Lane in the autumn of 1891. At that rate, if Jones could sell an entire 640-acre section of land at the rate of \$30 per acre, he would have \$19,500 or nearly half a million in 2012 dollars.

Jones managed to sell a few more town lots during the summer of 1892. C. T. Sproul, in fact, obtained lots in Christoval on three separate occasions during that year. The first piece of property, transferred on July 6, consisted of a one-quarter acre lot adjacent to the property sold to John Jones for the purposes of establishing a general store. Within two weeks, Jones sold Sproul another lot of the same size for the nominal fee of one dollar. Sproul had taken advantage of the inducement Jones offered at the beginning of 1891 whereby Jones would provide the lot free of charge assuming the grantee would provide \$200 of improvements on said property. Sproul purchased an additional one-half acre in October for thirty dollars, bringing his total holdings in Christoval to a full acre.⁶¹ J. M. O'Kelley also received a tract of land based on the incentive program offered by Jones. The

⁶¹Tom Green County Deed Records, Book 7, 239-41.

deed provided O'Kelley with a one-quarter acre tract of land. Interestingly, the O'Kelley deed, originally delivered in August 1892, was not recorded in the official records until 1910.⁶²

In addition to selling off small tracts of land, Jones managed to purchase two more pieces of property in 1892. He bought the land from a sheriff's sale. If a property owner failed to pay taxes on a piece of land, the county sheriff seized the property and auctioned it to recover the revenue for the county. Jones purchased Survey 69 in the name of Charles Clark for \$12.75 in taxes and an additional \$4.50 in fees. The 589.67-acre property lay on the east bank of the South Concho River, directly across from Survey 70, which W. C. sold to his son-in-law, James, just a year earlier.⁶³ Jones purchased this property for just under three cents per acre. At this price, he could realize enormous profit by selling the property for price similar to that which he gave Weddell, which at \$4.38 per acre was a steal for Jones' son-in-law.

The other property Jones purchased at the sheriff's sale amounted to 88.5 acres of riverfront land known as Survey 85 in the name of Arabella Harrington. Harrington immigrated to Texas prior to its independence, thus granted a first class headright consisting of one league and one labor of land. A league of land consisted of 4428.4 acres of land suitable for grazing while the smaller labor included 177 acres of farmland near a water source. Harrington, at the time of her petition for Survey 85, had already received the league of land. The parcel on the South Concho represented the labor the new nation owed her. By

⁶²Tom Green County Deed Records, Book 64, 382.

⁶³Tom Green County Deed Records, Book P, 146.

1892, the owner of the land could not be found. The taxes had been left unpaid. Jones picked up a portion of the Harrington labor for just \$6.40 plus fees.

At the beginning of September, Robert, W. C. and Margaret's eldest son, matriculated at Daniel Baker College in Brownwood, Texas.⁶⁴ The college opened its doors to students only two years prior and served as an arm of the Northern Presbyterian Church. A co-educational institution, Daniel Baker College sought to repress "rowdyism among the men and affectation and silly sentimentalism among the women."⁶⁵ The administrators believed by allowing the two sexes to interact under their watchful eyes, the school could provide "the best substitute available for home life."⁶⁶ At twenty years old, Robert hoped to expand his experience and education by spending some time away from home. Records do not indicate how long he went to the college, but economic conditions in the region caused a precipitous drop in attendance—from over two hundred in 1891 to less than one hundred in 1894.⁶⁷

Robert, accompanied by W. C. and Margaret, took the Santa Fe to Brownwood. Upon arrival, the Joneses ensured Robert had all he needed then continued on the train to visit their family in Wisconsin.⁶⁸ The extension of the Santa Fe Railroad to San Angelo made the frequent trips north far faster and safer for the family. While trains had been

⁶⁴*San Angelo Standard*, September 10, 1892.

⁶⁵Daniel Baker College, *Catalogue of Daniel Baker College, 1903-1904*, Book, [ca. 1903]; digital images, (<http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapht45499/>), accessed December 12, 2013, crediting Howard Payne University Library, Brownwood, Texas.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷Louann Atkins Temple, "Daniel Baker College," *Handbook of Texas Online* (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/kbd06>), accessed December 12, 2013.

⁶⁸*San Angelo Standard*, September 10, 1892.

available for their initial trip to Texas, the Joneses were forced to embark on a month-long wagon ride from San Antonio to Ben Ficklin. The twenty-mile trek to Santa Fe Depot from Christoval seemed like nothing, shrinking the size of the country down to something far more manageable. During their extended stay in the Upper Midwest, W. C. continued his discussion about the economic opportunities in his corner of West Texas, hoping to sell a few more lots and farms in the Christoval area in the process.

W. C. and Margaret returned home in time to spend the holiday season with their children. James and Sadie Weddell hosted Thanksgiving dinner that year on their ranch located south of Christoval on the western bank of the South Concho River. D. B. Cusenbary, a South Concho rancher, joined the family for dinner and claimed the day was "the finest time he has had the pleasure of enjoying for many years."⁶⁹ W. C.'s sister Jane, Minnie Toole, and presumably Will were the only other family members who attended. Robert could not make the trip from Brownwood to be with his family. G. B. Rappleye, S. O. Richardson, and Miss Covert also accepted invitations to the extravagant holiday feast.⁷⁰

Despite the tragic loss of loved ones, the early 1890s marked a time of great change in the Jones' household. The period witnessed lawsuits by and against Jones, most of which involved the various entanglements from operating an agricultural venture. Furthermore, Margaret and W. C.'s children quickly approached adulthood. By the end of 1892, two of their five children remained at home. After the loss of her husband, Minnie Toole lived with

⁶⁹*San Angelo Standard*, December 10, 1892.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

her parents until she took a job as the first teacher at the Sims Common School during the 1892-93 academic year.⁷¹ During that time, she boarded with the Sims family, likely returning to her parents' home when school let out.

As Jones became more satisfied with the land he had accumulated, he began to rethink his economic endeavors. Viewing the past performance of the wool industry and sensing its future direction, the entrepreneur looked to other streams of revenue. Expanding his agricultural holdings to the realms of cattle and horses, Jones worked to diversify his livestock portfolio. A more significant economic expansion, however, came in his real estate developments. Through ingenuity and initiative, W. C. founded a new town surrounded by land he owned. From that he sold small-irrigated farms to help augment the population with families that would have the ability to make a living consistently on their property regardless of fluctuating rainfall. Although still in its infancy, Christoval seemed to hold great potential, especially for creating Jones a profit, due to the persistent promotion employed by Jones during his trips to San Angelo. Located on a road that ran through the heart of the Edwards Plateau ranch country and adjacent to the beautiful South Concho River, the village stood in a prime area for trade. The relative serenity of the prior three years, however, could not prepare Jones for the political and economic turbulence to come.

⁷¹*Tom Green County: Chronicles of Our Heritage Volume 1* (Abilene, TX: H. V. Chapman & Sons, 2003), 166.

CHAPTER IV

“THE TARIFF, THE PANIC, THE DROUTH”

The year 1893 brought an economic panic unlike anything the nation had seen. Initiated by the failure of the Pennsylvania & Reading Railroad, uncertainty crept into the market, causing reverberations across the country. Hundreds of banks and thousands of business failed because of the severe economic downturn. Ranchers in Texas felt the effects of the depression through significantly lower prices for cattle and wool—both vital to the economy in the Concho Valley. The panic coupled with a drought that had been in effect since 1890 caused the failure of smaller ranching outfits across the region.¹ The downturn did not threaten to ruin Jones, he had established himself too well for that, but a lack of confidence in the economy led to a serious decline in the number of land deals Jones transacted for the rest of the 1890s. Indeed, from 1893 to 1899 Jones only recorded seven sales, one of which went to his two sons.

On March 13, 1893, Jones sold a fourth tract of land in Christoval to C. T. Sproul. Measuring one-half of an acre, this additional lot meant Sproul now owned one and one-half acres in total in the town.² For all four transactions, which took place over the course of eight months, Jones received \$66 from Sproul. The first three sales included tracts of land that abutted against each other, eventually allowing Sproul to own a piece of land measuring

¹Paul H. Carlson, *Amarillo: The Story of a Western Town* (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2006), 51.

²Tom Green County Deed Records, Book 7, 536.

seventy-five varas by seventy-five and one-half varas, just a shade over one acre. The piece sold in 1893 consisted of half of an acre adjacent to Mrs. A. E. Evans' plot of land.

The only other land transaction Jones had that year involved another lot in Christoval. In May Jones sold to Jeff Flemister one-quarter of an acre of land in the village for \$30. Flemister did not have the ability to pay the money up front, so he signed a promissory note for the amount that came due October 1, 1893. In order to ensure payment, Jones asked Flemister to sign a vendor's lien. The \$30 loan took Flemister longer than expected to pay, however. Jones recorded a quitclaim on the one-quarter acre tract three years later, in the winter of 1896.³ Due to the economic situation, the duration of the loan lasted longer than originally expected. Flemister persevered, eventually satisfying Jones with full payment of principal and interest, which allowed Jones to grant a clean deed to Flemister.

Though the real estate market began to cool off, Jones recorded a few livestock transactions during 1893. That summer Jones sold his wool clip through the firm of Jackson, Cramer & March for fifteen cents per pound. The Jones clip must have been remarkable because he received the highest reported price for the season. The *Standard* published the terms of sales for seventeen wool raisers who sold their clip that summer. Jones and James Shaffer were the only two who garnered fifteen cents. The average price for a pound of wool in the region that summer was only 13.3 cents, with D. J. Dunagan receiving only 10.5 cents per pound. The firm of Jackson, Cramer & March also represented Jones' friend D. B. Cusenbary, whose clip went for only 13 cents per pound.⁴ Later that year Jones sold 400

³Tom Green County Deed Records, Book 11, 273-4.

⁴*San Angelo Standard*, July 8, 1893.

head of cows to the firm, Harris Bros. & Childress, at \$9 per head, which he planned to deliver in the spring of 1894.⁵

For the past year the "cattle kings of the Conchos," Bird, Mertz, and Ellis had leased the W. C. Jones pasture. The pasture contained sixteen sections of lands, or 10,240 acres, and had been purchased or leased out of railroad lands near the South Concho River.⁶ Bird, Mertz, and Ellis, however, had completed their own pasture between the Middle and the North Concho rivers. The cattlemen decided to round up their 1,500 head of three-year-old steers and drive them to their newly complete pasture. Jones, upon learning of the change, decided to "restock his pasture with 2,500 mutton and four or five hundred beeves" of his own.⁷

A week following Thanksgiving Day W. C. appeared in district court to file suit against the DeLong family over water rights. G. W. DeLong, who died in 1889, sold Jones the property on the South Concho that included the Eldridge Survey out of which W. C. created Christoval. DeLong included one-quarter interest in the South Concho Irrigation Company in the deed from December 1882. Jones insisted that the water rights from the irrigation company had been the "chief inducement" that led to his purchase of the land. All of the irrigated farms Jones had sold near Christoval included a proportional interest in that

⁵*San Angelo Standard*, October 12, 1893.

⁶*San Angelo Standard*, November 7, 1891.

⁷*San Angelo Standard*, September 2, 1893.

irrigation system. This fact saw Stidham, Lane, the widow Evans and her son Bob, Gibson, and Kirkpatrick join with Jones as plaintiffs.⁸

Jones argued the defendants had "exclusive use and control of said ditch and dam for three years—that during said time they have appropriated the flow of said water to their own use."⁹ The DeLongs, while using the water for their exclusive benefit, had continued to call on Jones to provide his one-quarter share in maintaining the irrigation system, which Jones claimed he always provided. To rectify the situation, Jones and his co-plaintiffs sought \$1,000 in damages and a writ of injunction from the court to prevent the misappropriation of water from occurring again. An issue occurred in the courtroom during the fall session calling for a continuance to perfect service.¹⁰ While not specified, the continuance likely meant one of the co-plaintiffs failed to appear for the court date. The following spring saw additional complications for Jones forcing the judge to dismiss the case and assess the court costs to the plaintiffs.¹¹

Southern Tom Green County, with its relatively sparse population, experienced its share of property crime and violence. In broad daylight on Thursday, December 15, 1893, an individual or a group of violent criminals happened upon the herders' camp of James Weddell, set up deep in his pasture. Weddell's employees left the station unattended while they went about the day's business. The marauders raided the site, "stealing everything of

⁸Tom Green County Civil Court Case, Jones et al v. Sam DeLong et al 825, Plaintiff's Demand.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰*San Angelo Standard*, December 16, 1893.

¹¹*San Angelo Standard*, May 19, 1894.

value [and] set fire to what was left."¹² In an attempt to receive justice, Weddell placed an advertisement in the newspaper offering a \$20 reward for the arrest and conviction of the group responsible. This act represented the first record of violence or theft in the Christoval area that appeared in the press. As the traffic on the San Angelo to Sonora highway increased so did reports of criminal activity in the region.

By the close of 1893, Christoval began to feel the economic effects of the panic. The San Angelo newspaper periodically published a column written by a correspondent from the small village. One citizen observed,

Every body [*sic*] is complaining of hard times as there is no money in circulation to buy what men have to sell and all are hoping to tide themselves through the winter in hopes of better times in the spring and if the business men of San Angelo do not press their customers to the wall; forcing them to sell at ruinous sacrifices I feel certain that all will be well with the coming new year.¹³

The depression took little time to affect the pastoral country of the South Concho.

Regardless, people of West Texas held on to a sense of optimism, stating, "Every financial panic not only in the history of America but of every civilized nation has been succeeded by an era of prosperity commensurate with the preceeding [*sic*] panic."¹⁴ Because the 1893 panic represented the worst ever experienced, the following years would necessarily be the most prosperous ever known, or so Americans hoped.

¹²*San Angelo Standard*, December 16, 1893.

¹³*San Angelo Standard*, November 25, 1893.

¹⁴*San Angelo Standard*, January 28, 1894.

Despite the rough financial times, Jones managed to sell two pieces of property during 1894. Both sales took place during the spring of that year. John R. Gibson, who purchased 111 acres from Jones during the summer of 1892, expanded his holdings by an additional forty acres. Jones executed the original sale to Gibson as a bond for title; W. C. would retain the title until Gibson paid for the land. Gibson managed to pay the \$3,550 by 1893 and sought to add forty acres of irrigated land. Jones obliged the request by adding the two deals together, acknowledging the receipt of \$3,628.54 and extending a promissory note for the remaining \$921.46. The agreement included water rights from the South Concho Irrigation Company, over which Jones had recently sued the DeLong family.¹⁵

The second transaction went to G. W. Kirkpatrick, a co-plaintiff in the lawsuit against the DeLongs. Jones and Kirkpatrick had been in the process of making a deal on a thirty-five acre irrigated farm when the issue of water usage of the South Concho Irrigation Company went to litigation. The court dismissed the suit the very week the county clerk recorded this transaction in the deed records, which indicated the disposition allowed for those on the land to resume their use of water from the irrigation ditch controlled by the South Concho Irrigation Company. Kirkpatrick bought thirty-five acres taken from Surveys 75 and 77 for \$51 per acre.¹⁶ The small farm sat on the east bank of the river, just north of Christoval.

To further complicate a difficult financial time, the final promissory note for the mortgage Jones took through the Austin firm of the Brown Brothers on January 22, 1889 came due in May. W. C. managed to make the five thousand dollar payment, which cleared

¹⁵Tom Green County Deed Records, Book 10, 183.

¹⁶Tom Green County Deed Records, Book 10, 204.

his debt with J. Gordon Brown, over one month earlier than scheduled. R. L. Brown and J. Gordon Brown signed the release for over five thousand acres of Jones' land on the South Concho on March 26, 1894.¹⁷ The release, however, did not mark the end of the financial relationship between Jones and the Brown brothers. Producing the final payment for the 1889 loan proved to be too much stress on Jones' wallet. Less than three months later Jones mortgaged the same land minus the several town lots and small farms he had sold over the last few years. The terms of the deal were similar to the earlier agreement except Jones signed only one promissory note for five thousand dollars that matured on May 1, 1899. Interest for the loan amounted to ten percent per year, payable twice per year in gold coin.¹⁸

The faltering economy brought uncertainty and instability in the flow of currency, but a bigger threat loomed on the horizon. Congress in Washington sought to wreak havoc with the finances of West Texas through a proposed change in the tariff. For decades, the federal government provided protection for wool producers through the implementation of a tariff on imported wool. This protectionist stance served two purposes. First, national tariffs provided the bulk of revenue for the federal government prior to the institution of a direct income tax in the twentieth century. Second, and more significant for individual industries in the country, tariffs protected domestic growers and manufacturers from direct competition from other nations. For instance, every pound of wool imported into the United States paid a set fee just to cross the border. Under the McKinley Tariff of 1890, the last time it had changed prior to the 1894 discussion, the duties importers paid amounted to eleven cents per

¹⁷Deed of Trust, Book M, 93-4.

¹⁸Deed of Trust, Book M, 163-7.

pound for clothing wool, twelve cents for combing wool, and up to thirteen cents for carpet wool.¹⁹ Though an imperfect system, these fees stabilized the price of wool in the United States, so if demand warranted the importation of wool local producers would have a slight advantage in the market.

In December 1893, Congressman William L. Wilson, the chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, proposed a massive alteration to the McKinley Tariff. Wilson, a Democrat, wanted to place wool along with several other raw materials on the free list, allowing other countries to import their products without paying any sort of tariff. A second aspect of the proposed reform of the tariff that brought significant outrage from West Texas involved the retention of the tariff on manufactured products made from wool. Rather than being placed on the free list with the raw material, these products received a slight reduction in the amount of protection received from the government. Furthermore, while raw wool would immediately be placed on the free list, the change in the manufactured products' classification would occur after one year, allowing eastern manufacturers to reap maximum profits at the expense of southern and western growers.²⁰ Woolgrowers viewed the disparity in the treatment of raw wool and the finished product as an indication that politicians in Washington only considered the interests of the manufacturers in the eastern half of the nation, renewing the old sectional antagonism that preceded the Civil War. Between the end

¹⁹ Paul H. Carlson, *Texas Woollybacks: The Range Sheep and Goat Industry* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1982), 142.

²⁰ F. W. Taussig, *The History of Tariffs of the United States, Part I* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1910), 178-80.

of 1893 and February 1, 1894, when the House passed the proposal, the discussion about the prospects of changing the tariff on wool dominated the region.

To constituents in West Texas, placing wool on the free list amounted to a direct assault on their livelihoods. In the pursuit of "cheap blankets, hats and clothing...the southern sheep industry is to be ruined to give eastern mill men cheap raw material."²¹ One writer predicted the result of sacrificing West Texas "for the behoof of Massachusetts—the next election will not find Texas the 'banner democratic state of the Union.'"²² The four million sheep in Texas under the McKinley tariff "meant \$4,000,000 in wool which augmented by \$2,000,000 in mutton produce aggregated the neat sum of \$6,000,000."²³ Those numbers would drop precipitously following the removal of wool from national protection, leaving a large hole in Texas' economy. Of course, "the howlers of free wool advocate that the removal of the tariff will not bankrupt the industry in our country" but it might suffer for a single season.²⁴ However, according to the theory of supply and demand, which the advocates of free wool cited, the price of the product would only increase if production drops. Because foreign wool producers would not refrain from dumping their product on the newly free American market, the Texas wool growing industry would necessarily fail.

Democrats' push to place wool on the free list put the Democratic Congressman from the region in an unenviable predicament. T. M. Paschal from Castroville represented the

²¹*San Angelo Standard*, December 2, 1893.

²² Ibid.

²³*San Angelo Standard*, December 23, 1893.

²⁴ Ibid.

twelfth district in Texas, which stretched from San Antonio to Midland to the Big Bend region and held all of the Edwards Plateau sheep land.²⁵ A staunch Democrat, Paschal suggested that West Texans "bow to its [Democrats'] superior party wisdom and judgment when deliberately formulated and expressed either in platform or legislation."²⁶ He mentioned the electoral mandate for tariff reform Democrats received in the previous election then pointed out, "It is impossible to frame a tariff measure that will not pinch, more or less, some industry" but "good Democrats and patriotic citizens stand by any action which the committee may report."²⁷ He concluded by stating that "in the minds of the best thinkers and shrewdest observers...the element of certainty and fixedness" of placing wool on the free list "would be far better, so far as the price of wool is concerned, than the everlasting tinkering that has for so many years demoralized legislation on the subject."²⁸ Paschal, the representative from West Texas, told his constituents that the Democrats knew the best course of action, and he would listen to his party before he would listen to the people he represented.

The reaction to the condescending nature of Paschal's appeal came with understandable fury. A collection of prominent businessmen from San Antonio sought to conspire with woolgrowers from the twelfth district to form an organization to protect the wool interests of Texas. The members of the organization would "support and use every

²⁵Texas Congressional Districts 1892-1900 Elections retrieved from http://www.tlc.state.tx.us/redist/pdf/congress_historical/c_1892_1900.pdf

²⁶*San Angelo Standard*, November 18, 1893.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

means in his power to obtain for the Twelfth congressional district a Representative who will pledge himself to represent and defend the interest of his constituents against the woolgrowers of foreign nations."²⁹ To make matters worse for Paschal, citizens in San Angelo started a petition to help persuade Congress to change the proposed tariff so it would continue to protect wool. The sheepmen sent the petition to a Republican representative from Michigan to ensure the twenty-five foot long document entered in the congressional record.³⁰

Just the discussion of removing wool from tariff protection had a significant effect on the wool industry in the region. Anxiety about the assumed drop in wool prices following its placement on the free list prompted many producers to dump their product on the market. This phenomenon began to take place more than a year before the tariff became the law of the land. During the summer of 1893 the price "of domestic wool [was] weak, and mark[ed] a considerable decline since April 1st. This decline extends to all domestic varieties," the *Standard* reported.³¹ By that time, the industry commentators warned, "This haste to sell enriches nobody. It demoralizes the market for woollen goods without permitting manufacturers to make any reduction in the prices of their goods."³² These conditions became unbearable for some. Robert Maudsley found his brother Henry "dead, in a fearful state of decomposition, with the top of his head shot off by the deadly Winchester by his

²⁹*San Angelo Standard*, January 13, 1894.

³⁰*San Angelo Standard*, January 20, 1894.

³¹*San Angelo Standard*, July 1, 1893.

³² *Ibid.*

side. He had evidently taken off his shoes and touched the trigger with his toes."³³ Before committing suicide, Henry penned a note to explain his motive. He wrote, "The tariff, the panic, the drouth and the scattering of the sheep bring me to this."³⁴ Henry had considerable trouble with controlling his sheep, in addition to the enormous economic pressures of the past two years.

R. C. Sanderson, nephew to W. C. and Margaret, from Big Spring wrote about the proposed tariff. He opposed placing wool on the free list while leaving wool manufacturers protected. Sanderson argued the government could "not lessen the price of woollen goods by lessening the price of the raw material."³⁵ He felt it would only be fair if "congress is going to let down the bars for Australia, Cape of Good Hope, Natal and other wools to come in an compete with the producers, why not let the English, French and German manufacturers come in and compete with our manufacturers?"³⁶ Sanderson, like many other wool producers, felt like Congress had targeted them specifically while playing favoritism toward the manufacturing sector.

Ultimately, the tariff became law, but not before the Senate could strip most of the Democratic-instituted changes. Many Democratic Senators insisted on amendments that benefited their constituents, which produced a tariff that William L. Wilson and Democratic

³³*San Angelo Standard*, May 26, 1894.

³⁴*Ibid.*

³⁵*San Angelo Standard*, December 16, 1893.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

President Grover Cleveland believed unsatisfactory.³⁷ Regardless of the multiple changes that took place in the Senate, including a complete reversal on the protectionist fate of sugar, wool remained on the free list. Congressman Paschal refused to fight for the people he represented. The Wilson-Gorman Tariff went into effect on August 27, 1894. This policy proved to be the final straw for W. C. Jones. In October, he publicly announced that he "wants to engage in raising cattle only."³⁸ Just a week prior to the announcement Jones sold all of his remaining sheep, three thousand with wool, to J. L. Huffman for \$1.25 per head.³⁹ Due to his flexibility, Jones occupied a position where he could easily abandon one of his avenues of income because of the multiple businesses he engaged.

In an attempt to increase his cattle holdings, Jones scheduled a trip to the Hill Country just a few days after renouncing the sheep industry. Removing three thousand sheep permanently from his pasture meant Jones had "more grass than cattle and want[ed] to equalize things a little."⁴⁰ During the same period, the "jolly good-looking W. C. Jones" worked on purchasing more horses, too.⁴¹ Jones bought twenty-three head of horses and mares from his friend and neighbor, G. W. Kirkpatrick, at \$10 apiece. Horses for Jones were not a significant source of income. He had worked to sell stud services and bred fine horses,

³⁷Taussig, *History of Tariffs*, 179.

³⁸*San Angelo Standard*, October 6, 1894.

³⁹*San Angelo Standard*, September 29, 1894.

⁴⁰*San Angelo Standard*, September 22, 1894.

⁴¹*San Angelo Standard*, September 15, 1894.

but these stock horses would provide Jones with an opportunity to barter "a mare and colt for a good cow and calf."⁴²

People from the village of Christoval worked together to provide a sense of community during the holiday season. This pooling of resources and talent drew on the Joneses. The Sunday school group opted to have a public Christmas tree erected at the church for a Christmas Eve program. Sam DeLong and Robert Evans took responsibility for procuring the evergreen. Sadie Weddell joined the "committee on programme, and all the ladies [were] appointed to a committee on decoration."⁴³ Minnie Toole, who had taken a job teaching school in Verand back in October, would be home in time for the festivities. Her return, however, portended the end of the small community. The town closed the school "for want of patronage. It is stated on good authority that a water famine is threatening that place and those living at that place will have to leave on account of it."⁴⁴ The small community located five miles north of present-day Eldorado in Schleicher County had access to only one water well, which the Vermont ranching group controlled. After the windmill fell into disrepair, the ranching outfit refused citizens access to the machine, forcing them to leave the area.

With the new year came a reevaluation of the economic status of the region. J. E. Rucker, a Christoval farmer who often sold his wares in San Angelo, commented on the situation. Rucker spent a day in early January walking around the business district of the

⁴²*San Angelo Standard*, December 1, 1894.

⁴³*San Angelo Standard*, December 22, 1894.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

county seat to determine the prevailing mood regarding the economy. Upon asking, "How is business?" one merchant responded, "Considering the hard times, very good."⁴⁵ Another dry goods retailer declared his "sales have not varied more than a few dollars per month in three years...the fact is times are always hard."⁴⁶ While receiving mixed messages from the local businessmen, Rucker acknowledged that "those who have nothing to sell, it is perhaps harder for him to get a job than it used to be."⁴⁷ For Jones, the downturn continued to attenuate his prospects for dealing in real estate. During all of 1895, W. C. did not sell an irrigated farm nor a town lot in Christoval. The land business, at least for Jones, had completely stalled as a result of the Panic of 1893.

The dearth of land sales did not hinder Jones in expanding his cattle business. In a continuation of the trend from the last quarter of 1894, Jones bought cattle from around the state in a frenzy. In early January, Jones traveled down to southern Texas to examine some cattle for a potential purchase. He returned a week later with 236 head of cattle that he purchased for an undisclosed amount. Jones probably got a good deal on the beeves as they "were very thin in order and some will do well to get through the winter."⁴⁸ The herd Jones led into his pasture showed "quite a contrast between western and southern cattle, there being

⁴⁵*San Angelo Standard*, January 12, 1895.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸*San Angelo Standard*, January 26, 1895.

no grass at all in that country."⁴⁹ Jones, however, had an abundance of grass just waiting to fatten up the emaciated stock.

Months later, after having an opportunity to put some bulk on his sickly cattle from South Texas, Jones began a flurry of stock trading that lasted about six weeks. At the end of July, W. C. sold four hundred head of one and two-year-old steers to the Harris Brothers at \$12 and \$16 respectively.⁵⁰ Initially, the two parties kept the terms of the deal private, but Jones later revealed the price he received from L. B. Harris, also stating he "thought by holding off longer could have done still better."⁵¹ Soon after the Harris deal Jones advertised that he had an additional two hundred fifty steers, both four and five-year-old, available for sale at market prices.⁵² The same article that reported on Jones' sale to Harris mentioned the price of "milk cows are ranging from \$30 to \$50. This is something like the boom in cattle they tell us about 30 or more years ago."⁵³ Jones' decision to focus on trading cattle came just ahead of the trend. Less than one year prior, he made the prescient declaration forsaking the sheep industry in favor of cattle. W. C. maintained visibility in his transactions, helping create the image of a boom through his numerous dealings.

Jones did not concentrate merely on selling during this period. George Holland, a South Concho neighbor, sold W. C. his entire herd of cattle in September. Holland held two

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ *San Angelo Standard*, August 3, 1895.

⁵¹ *San Angelo Standard*, August 17, 1895.

⁵² *San Angelo Standard*, August 10, 1895.

⁵³ *San Angelo Standard*, August 17, 1895.

hundred fifty stock cattle for which Jones paid \$10 per head. Holland owned another one hundred forty cattle in conjunction with Sam DeLong. Jones purchased that group for \$1,820 or \$13 per head.⁵⁴ Although Holland sold Jones all the cattle he owned, he did not plan to quit the business. Soon after the report of the sale came out, Holland stated he would travel to Georgia to procure more cattle⁵⁵

Nuptial vows were exchanged at the Jones home again on September 24, 1895. Minnie Toole, at the age of twenty-five, fell in love with Hector McKenzie, a local sheepman. For Minnie, this represented another opportunity to have a family after the tragic end of her first attempt. McKenzie was about nine years older than his new bride. Rather than having a large ceremony, "the wedding was a very quiet one, only the immediate relatives of the contracting parties being present."⁵⁶ The newlyweds after the ceremony moved into Hector's home east of San Angelo. The students and staff at the Christoval school, where Minnie had worked, sent the blushing bride a note of congratulations to celebrate the fact that she "was lately promoted" to Mrs. Minnie (Toole) McKenzie.⁵⁷

Two months later, James and Sadie Weddell again hosted Thanksgiving dinner at their home. Sadie prepared the meal for her parents and siblings along with several friends from the community. The merchant and postmaster of Christoval, John Jones, joined the family for the festivities. John's service in the village over the last four years had placed him

⁵⁴*San Angelo Standard*, September 14, 1895.

⁵⁵*San Angelo Standard*, September 21, 1895.

⁵⁶*San Angelo Standard*, September 28, 1895.

⁵⁷*San Angelo Standard*, October 5, 1895.

in high esteem as a friend and neighbor. As the only merchant in Christoval, Uncle Johnnie, as he was called, added a factor of convenience and cohesion to the developing community. He and W. C. worked together in 1891 to have the Christoval post office moved a mile and one-half south so it would be located in the new town.

Uncle Johnnie left the Weddell's ranch at around eleven o'clock that evening to make the short trip back to his home, which lay in the back of his store. The Postmaster "unlocked his store door, opened it and struck a match, when he saw two men on the inside of the building, one of whom immediately shoved a pistol to his face and fired. Mr. Jones reeled and fell and the two men ran past him out of the store."⁵⁸ Although he had been shot in the face, Uncle Johnnie managed to return to his feet and lock the door to his place. The gunshot aroused the attention of Cy Ogden, who had been visiting his mother-in-law across the road from the crime scene.

Ogden, though not a resident of Christoval, managed to gather a few people to provide the assaulted merchant a midnight ride to San Angelo to receive medical attention. The group arrived at the Landon Hotel at around three in the morning. Doctor Mays, upon examining Jones, suggested he had a reasonable chance to recover. The assailant's "bullet entered through the right cheek about an inch back of the mouth, passed through the tongue, almost severing it twain, and came out the left jaw near the ear, tearing away about an inch and a half of the jaw bone."⁵⁹ Because of the deplorable condition of his mouth, Uncle Johnnie could not speak. Instead, he wrote a description of his attackers, stating, "The men

⁵⁸*San Angelo Standard*, November 30, 1895.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

were white and apparently small in stature and that he [John Jones] is almost positive that he knows who they are."⁶⁰

Uncle Johnnie came out of the ordeal surprisingly well considering the gunshot. Because John interrupted the process, the thieves managed only to abscond with a couple of suits of clothes and an overcoat. Although the safe lay open, over \$100 remained in the strongbox undisturbed. Tom Green County Sheriff Rome Shield, following his investigation of the crime scene, determined the assailants fired the bullet through the door separating Uncle Johnnie's living quarters from the store. As the merchant entered the store, the intruders, who only managed to infiltrate Jones' living space, took a blind shot through the door, conflicting with Uncle Johnnie's account of events. The wild gunshot then struck John in the face.⁶¹ The resilient shopkeeper took only a few weeks to recover. S. O. Richardson assisted Jones by running his business during his period of recovery. By Christmas Uncle Johnnie had regained his ability to speak and had returned to his store.⁶²

The violent attack did not dampen the holiday spirit in Christoval, due in part to the non-lethal nature of Uncle Johnnie's wounds. The Union Church held a program on Christmas Eve with the lighting of a tree and two performers, Professor Strickland and Miss Rains, providing entertainment. All who attended the program "seemed to get presents and a

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² *San Angelo Standard*, December 26, 1895.

happier crowd of people" never existed." W. C. and Margaret hosted "a most excellent Christmas dinner" for many members of the community the following day.⁶³

Jones continued to work the cattle business both locally and through sales in the Chicago market in 1896. W. C. employed John Lovelady as an agent to facilitate local sales. Lovelady connected Jones to General Charles McFarland from Weatherford, who took possession of two hundred head of steers, ages three and up, for \$20 per head. General McFarland hoped to purchase "a few thousand more if he can get them right" while he visited the western portion of the state.⁶⁴ Later in the year, Jones shipped three cars of cattle to Chicago. Two cars contained cattle averaging eight hundred pounds and sold for \$2.20 and \$2.45 per pound. The third car offered steers that averaged nine hundred pounds and sold for \$3.30 per pound.⁶⁵ Aside from these two sales, Jones registered no other economic activity during the year. The real estate market still had not recovered, at least with regard to sales in and around Christoval. W. C. did not buy or sell a single piece of property during 1896.

The two Jones sons, Robert and Will, opted to take a trip to Montana.⁶⁶ The northern Rocky Mountain state offered a far more livestock-centered economy when compared to Texas. While the Lone Star State boasted a population of about 2.6 million residents in 1895, Montana, which joined the Union in 1889, had just over two hundred thousand citizens. With the population numbers in mind, the fact that Texas ranchers held just over

⁶³*San Angelo Standard*, January 4, 1896.

⁶⁴*San Angelo Standard*, January 11, 1896.

⁶⁵*San Angelo Standard*, December 12, 1896.

⁶⁶*San Angelo Standard*, April 11, 1896.

two and one-half times the number of cattle should not be surprising. Cattle existed in Texas in a 1:1 ratio with people while there were more than five cows for each man, woman and child in Montana. The sheep numbers proved even more astonishing. While Texans had only .69 sheep for each citizen, Montanans boasted a remarkable 13.84 sheep per person.⁶⁷ The northern state relied on raising livestock much more than the relatively diversified Texas. Robert and Will—twenty-four and twenty-three years old, respectively—stood to learn quite a bit as they walked across the threshold of adulthood.

Residents of Christoval worked together during the summer to throw an extravagant picnic to celebrate the anniversary of the nation's independence. Organizers created four separate committees to delegate the enormous amount of work required to host such a picnic. The elder ranchmen of the area made up the committee on grounds and cooking. This group included W. C. Jones, George Holland, A. E. Sheppard, and the DeLong brothers. As indicated by the name, these men cleaned the grounds, prepared the pit for cooking, and barbecued the meat. The Committee on subscription, headed by John Jones, worked to secure the funding and purchase the meats and other foods. The third group, which included James Weddell, worked to arrange games and entertainment for the day. A committee of women was responsible for the table and service of the foods. These four committees met on June 27, a week before the picnic, to begin work on the section of land that lay at South Concho River crossing next to Jones's residence.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Montana Bureau of Agriculture, Labor, and Industry, *Fifth Annual Report of the Bureau of Agriculture, Labor, and Industry of Montana for the Year Ended November 30, 1897* (Helena: State Publishing Company, 1898), 123; Texas Department of Agriculture, Insurance, Statistics, and History, *Ninth Annual Report of the Agricultural Bureau, 1895* (Austin: Ben C. Jones & Co., 1897), 343.

⁶⁸*San Angelo Standard*, June 27, 1896.

The event turned out to be an unqualified success. In addition to simply clearing the area of undergrowth, the organizers erected a large stage for dancing and speaking as well as numerous dinner tables. Enormous pits of barbecued beef and mutton emitted enticing aromas until the moment they were served at 12:30. One commenter observed, "To say that the 1,000 people from Angelo, Knickerbocker, Schleicher and Irion and the South Concho and the country all around did not enjoy themselves at this barbecue would be telling an untruth."⁶⁹ Political candidates, including Joseph Spence, Jr., S. E. Taylor, Ed Duggan, and C. B. Metcalfe, took turns addressing the crowds. Professor Stricklen read the Declaration of Independence aloud to remind visitors of the reason for the celebration. Copious amounts of dancing and heated horse races also occupied the revelers.⁷⁰ An attendee from Knickerbocker wrote of the event, "Charley Metcalfe walked off with first honors and Ed Taylor won an easy second on the speechifying. Perhaps we won first medal on eating. At any rate we have not felt well in the digestive region since that day."⁷¹

Oration by political candidates at the Independence Day picnic indicated the fact that elections drew near. Indeed, the 1896 presidential election involved two major issues—monetary policy and tariff reform. Resulting from the economic hardship that hand endured since the panic three years earlier, many Americans, particularly agrarians, pushed for a bimetal currency system. At the time, the United States operated on the gold standard. This meant gold held in the coffers of the treasury directly backed all money circulating in the

⁶⁹*San Angelo Standard*, July 11, 1896.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹"Knickerbocker Items," *San Angelo Standard*, July 11, 1896.

economy. Because of the high price and relative scarcity of gold, not much currency circulated in the country. Proponents for the populist bimetallism believed diluting the currency would lead to an inflationary effect, ultimately resulting in higher prices for agricultural goods. Of course, inflation would cause all prices to rise, not just farm products. The controversial nature of the issue produced heated public debates.

The year 1896 also presented an opportunity for the public to react electorally to the changes in tariff protection enacted by the Democratic administration of President Grover Cleveland in 1894. Democrats believed tariff reform legislated two years earlier did not go far enough to establish free trade because of concessions to many industries. Wool growing regions took the brunt of the blow from the free trade movement. The mere discussion of removing tariff protection for wool resulted in weak prices of the commodity.⁷² Some sheep raisers continued to ply their trade, while others, like Jones, decided to abandon the industry. The people negatively affected by the free trade policy of the Democrats looked to the Republican Party to reestablish protectionist tariffs.

Tom Green County Republicans, after a midterm House of Representatives victory with Judge Noonan, sought to continue with their momentum in rallying votes for William McKinley. In fact, the 1894 congressional election and the 1896 presidential election represented a shift from the third party system, which featured competitive races between Democrats and Republicans, to the fourth party system when Republicans held a distinct advantage. During the years following the Civil War, Republican and Democratic candidates fared equally well in elections. Following the 1893 economic panic and the "pietistic,

⁷²*San Angelo Standard*, July 1, 1893.

populist, [William Jennings] Bryan-led" Democratic Party alienated much of the electorate, pushing a majority of voters to favor Republicans for the next three decades.⁷³

Local Republicans held a mass meeting on August 12 to discuss the platform that had been adopted at the Republican National Convention a month earlier in Saint Louis, Missouri. Seventy-five people attended the meeting including Jones and his two sons-in-law. The fact that all three of these men participated in the Republican Party holds no surprises considering the declarations made at the meeting. To assist the livestock raisers, Republicans "respectfully demand[ed] the immediate restoration of equitable import duties upon wool and hides, which have been place upon the free-list by both Republican and Democratic Congresses to the great injustice to the two chief industries of West Texas."⁷⁴

More than simply attending, however, Jones and his sons-in-law actively participated in the event. During the meeting, the organization elected S. L. S. Smith, a medical doctor who had served at Fort Concho decades earlier, as the permanent chairman. Smith then set about the task of appointing individuals to serve on the necessary committees. The new chairman selected Jones to serve on the committee for selecting delegates along with Knickerbocker rancher and prominent Republican, Joseph Tweedy. Smith chose McKenzie for the committee on resolutions. George B. Jackson and J. L. Millspaugh also served on the resolutions committee. The organization selected Weddell to serve on the county executive committee. Despite the excitement coursing through the meeting that summer day, the

⁷³James Campbell. "Party Systems and Realignments in the United States, 1868-2004" *Social Science History* 30, no. 3: 371-2.

⁷⁴*San Angelo Standard*, August 15, 1896.

Democratic candidate, James Slayden, defeated George Noonan, who held his seat for only one term.⁷⁵ The election included a populist candidate named Taylor McRae who garnered over ten percent of the popular vote.

On a social note, Teresa Humphries, Jones' niece came to visit her Texas family during February of 1897. The daughter of W. C.'s younger sister Elizabeth and her husband Griffith Humphries, eighteen-year-old Teresa traveled alone to the Concho Valley to spend time with her aunt and uncle. During her extended stay in the area, "the charming and accomplished" (she studied music) Teresa spent a few days in the city of San Angelo as the guest of her cousin, Minnie McKenzie. The agrarian lifestyle of the Joneses provided a contrast for Teresa, whose father owned rental properties in Iowa.⁷⁶

Just a few weeks later, the Cumberland Presbyterian church in Christoval held an event to raise funds to erect a manse for their minister. The Stricklands hosted the fundraiser on February 19, which proved to be quite successful. Women from the church pieced together several "beautifully decorated baskets" to sale for one dollar each. William and Rob Jones helped the event by purchasing the first two baskets, starting a trend for the rest of the community. George Strickland also offered one-half of the proceeds from the phonograph to help ensure the success of the fundraiser. The event did not end without some theft, however. An unknown individual filched Jack Wilson's beautiful bay horse and \$40 red leather saddle as well as George Smith's hat during the fundraiser.⁷⁷

⁷⁵*San Angelo Standard*, August 15, 1897.

⁷⁶*San Angelo Standard*, February 13, 1897; Twelfth 1 of the United States: 1900-Population, Iowa County, Iowa, Supervisor's District 2, Enumeration District 50, Sheet 18.

⁷⁷*San Angelo Standard*, February 27, 1897.

By 1897, Rob and Will Jones had begun to work in the cattle industry with their father. Both in their mid-twenties, the brothers together owned stock separate from W. C. that they drove to market in San Angelo to sell to a broker. Livestock broker John Lovelady offered the young men \$14, \$16 and \$24.50 for their one, two, and three-year-old steers, respectively. Wily W. C., never one to pass up free labor, bundled a "small bunch" of his own cattle with his sons' to have them sell.

As the village of Christoval grew, the need for a public graveyard became increasingly obvious. Because of this necessity, Jones sold his first piece of property in three years. Carving a three-acre tract of land from the Albert Black survey directly north of Christoval allowed for the creation of the cemetery. The deed placed three residents, C. C. Doty, A. E. Sheppard, and Mabra Gardner, as trustees for the property. The three trustees provided Jones with \$60 for the use of the land. Because the land held a public purpose, the three trustees charged with controlling and managing the land would appoint successors to maintain the property when they became unable to perform that duty.⁷⁸

In early spring, W. C. and his sister Jane journeyed to the bustling city of San Antonio to attend the annual Texas Live Stock Association and Cattle Raisers' Association meeting. The year 1897 represented the first time when the two organizations chose to hold their meetings in the same location at the same time in an effort to encourage further networking opportunities. The city of San Antonio provided elaborate entertainment for the "big, manly looking set of fellows" who descended on the city including an enormous

⁷⁸Tom Green County Deed Records, Book 12, 61.

barbecue, various bands playing music at Alamo and Military Plazas, and a full dress military parade consisting of the troops from Fort Sam Houston.⁷⁹

The over 1,200 members attending the meetings exhibited a "happy frame of mind" due to the excellent condition of the cattle market. Naturally, the meeting covered the obligatory topic of expanding membership. So many new faces attended the sessions that the leadership agreed to suspend the meeting for a short time to allow individuals to apply for membership at the convention, as well as those who had fallen behind on their dues to attain good standing again. In addition to the regular business of the association, numerous experts attended the meeting to present papers and hold discussions on various topics pertinent to the cattle industry. The most anticipated of the presentations came from Dr. Paul Paquin, secretary of the Missouri Board of Health, who discussed the inoculation for the cattle disease known as Texas Fever.⁸⁰

Though the cattle industry boomed, landowners in Texas had to contend with an issue of significant importance in 1897. Early in the legislative session in Austin, Senator William Ward Turney proposed an amendment to the Texas Constitution that would allow for the creation of irrigation districts in the western portion of the state. The movement for such an amendment began three years earlier as many prominent Texans congregated in San Antonio for the inaugural meeting of the Texas State Irrigation Association. Members of the organization elected Judge J. H. McLeary as the president. During his address McLeary stated the group sought to "make the desert blossom and to make that part of the country

⁷⁹*San Antonio Light*, March 8, 1897.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

heretofore considered as only a stock range an agricultural country."⁸¹ The initial meeting included the presentation of many papers pertinent to the implementation of irrigation systems. Enthusiastic irrigation proponents left San Antonio anxious to continue their work at the next scheduled meeting in Laredo, Texas, in December 1896.

During the second gathering, J. G. Murphy of San Angelo took the reins as president of the organization. In keeping with stated goals of the association, Murphy and other leaders believed the implementation of "wise and conservative laws might be planned in the end that the waters of western Texas might be enjoyed by the people themselves."⁸² Members of the group looked to the initial draft of a potential constitutional amendment written by Abilene lawyer Henry Sayles. The amendment would allow for the creation of irrigation districts to organize the distribution of water. These irrigation districts, which would be created through the majority vote of landowners in each district, would derive revenue through the taxation of irrigable lands.⁸³

Individuals like Jones, who already owned irrigated land, watched this development with concern. The prospect of additional taxation brought about a certain amount of anxiety amongst landowners, but a second, more intrusive provision of the proposed amendment produced outrage. While not explicitly stated, the language of the amendment would allow districts to place liens of \$15 per acre on irrigated land that individuals had already irrigated in an attempt to fund other irrigation projects. Dr. Boyd Cornick of Knickerbocker, Texas,

⁸¹"State convention at San Antonio, Texas," *Irrigation Age* 9, no 1(January 1896): 37.

⁸²*San Angelo Standard*, July 31, 1897.

⁸³*Dallas Morning News*, February 9, 1897.

wrote a letter to the editor of the *Dallas Morning News* denouncing the amendment as "a new and dangerous experiment in state socialism" because of the redistribution of power over water supplies in the arid and semiarid regions of the state. Cornick argued the amendment, based on an initiative from California, served to benefit land speculators rather than actual farmers.⁸⁴

Public debate regarding the irrigation issue continued throughout the summer leading to the election. Proponents discussed the vast untapped potential of the western two-thirds of the state. While some locations like Tom Green County already had well-developed irrigation systems in place, many less populated counties in West Texas failed to utilize their available water. The amendment did not actually change the water laws in the state; it simply allowed localities to vote for the creation of institutions to organize the implementation of irrigation systems. Like most large-scale projects, the initial cost proved to inhibit individual landowners from improving their land. The amendment, they urged, allowed for collectivization in counties that needed it while leaving more developed regions alone.⁸⁵

In late June, the citizens of Christoval held a public meeting to discuss the upcoming vote. Proclaiming their opposition to the irrigation amendment, Jones and other prominent South Concho residents gave "rousing speeches" about the ill effects of the potential amendment.⁸⁶ Those who attended the meeting unanimously signed a resolution stating their

⁸⁴*Dallas Morning News*, June 15, 1897.

⁸⁵*San Angelo Standard*, July 24, 1897.

⁸⁶*San Angelo Standard*, June 27, 1897.

opposition. Their rationale, much like others who publicly opposed the amendment, rested on the fact that the proposal was "contrary to the spirit of our government, unjust to a minority of citizens, and, if adopted, would help to place in bondage our children as well as ourselves."⁸⁷ W. C. and Will signed the resolution along with the DeLong family—Jones and the DeLongs operated the South Concho Irrigation Company—and other large landowners in the area.

A similar meeting in nearby Irion County caused some controversy in the area. The *San Angelo Standard*, which was owned by the president of the Texas State Irrigation Association, alleged that large anti-irrigation amendment meeting reported on by the *Irion County Record* was "a fake." Rather than containing a representative sample of the agricultural classes of the county, the article suggested the meeting consisted of only eight men, two of whom were doctors. The resolutions produced by the mass meeting of eight came from the mind of Dr. Cornick of Tom Green County. The *Standard* editor suggested the farce of a meeting's only purpose was to influence the voters of eastern Texas through the deliberate dissemination of copies of the newspaper purchased with a "slush fund" and distributed to east Texas newspapers.⁸⁸

Despite the rhetoric claiming widespread support for the amendment, Texans voted against the proposal by an overwhelming margin. Statewide the results were nearly two to one with 40,533 against and only 23,383 voting for the measure. The disparity in the vote in Tom Green County was much larger. Of the thirteen polling locations in the county, only

⁸⁷*San Angelo Standard*, July 3, 1897.

⁸⁸*San Angelo Standard*, July 17, 1897.

one—the M. P. Baze Ranch—showed a majority supporting the amendment with a vote of five for and four against. Christoval proved the unanimity of opposition at the voting booth with all twenty-eight votes cast against the amendment. Irion County, where the *Standard* claimed shenanigans regarding the anti-irrigation meeting, registered only one vote in support of the amendment with ninety-six against.⁸⁹ The amendment, which had been the product of several years of toil by its advocates, did not represent the proper way forward for the development of the western portion of the state in the view of a vast majority of Texans.

With the amendment defeated and the fate of Jones' irrigated land no longer in peril, the ranchman resumed dealing in cattle. The recorded transactions from 1897 show Jones in a position to be selective in his transactions. W. C. made three purchases in the waning months of the year. In September, Jones bought 50 "she cattle" from rancher Hood Murchison of Eldorado at an undisclosed price.⁹⁰ Just a week later he acquired another sixty-six head of stock cattle at \$14.25 per animal from the firm of Lovelady and Gwin.⁹¹ As the month of September wound down, Jones procured another bunch of "eastern cattle" from A. B. Priout of the Brazos region. For the unannounced number of cattle W. C. paid \$13 per head.⁹² During the same span of time, Jones refused two offers from potential buyers. One offered \$20 per head for stock cattle and the other \$27,000 for his 9,000-acre South Concho

⁸⁹*San Angelo Standard*, August 7, 1897.

⁹⁰*San Angelo Standard*, September 25, 1897.

⁹¹*San Angelo Standard*, October 9, 1897.

⁹²*San Angelo Standard*, October 2, 1897.

ranch and 3,000 cattle. The latter offer was far too low for Jones to consider based only on the value of the cattle, which would have been at least \$40,000.

Christoval that autumn offered a new type of event for its citizens. As W. C. nursed a broken arm he received from a forceful kick by one of his mares, Margaret and her youngest daughter Lizzie, along with the help of many local women, prepared the Jones house for what they termed an ice cream festival. The event, which would be much welcomed during the lingering heat of late September, saw promotion in the newspaper on two occasions hoping to draw a large crowd to enjoy the delectable dairy dessert. Young ladies in the small community, by helping with the preparations for the gathering, hoped to draw a large number of similarly aged available men to partake in the ice cream social.⁹³

As the year came to a close, Jones scheduled a trip to visit members of his family. In addition to traveling to Iowa and Nebraska where some of his siblings lived, Jones thought to "go across the big pond to his old home in the mountains of Wales."⁹⁴ The excursion lasted about from early December until late February, allowing the rancher plenty of time to enjoy the company of his family. Much like his earlier trip to the old country, Jones touted the magnificent opportunities available in the Concho Valley to his acquaintances in Wales. As W. C. prepared to return home, he wrote a letter announcing he would be bringing "quite a large number of Welsh people seeking locations in Western Texas."⁹⁵ This trip marked the first of several trips Jones would take of the next few years. By this time, the wealthy

⁹³Ibid.

⁹⁴*San Angelo Standard*, November 27, 1897.

⁹⁵*San Angelo Standard*, February 19, 1898.

landowner was approaching sixty years of age and his two sons had begun to take more responsibility with the family's business endeavors.

During W. C.'s absence, just a week before Christmas, sad news overtook the town of Christoval. The postmaster and only merchant John Jones, affectionately known as Uncle Johnnie, passed away. At fifty-seven years old, the English immigrant who played such an important role in the establishment and growth of the village suffered from poor cardiovascular health. Despite surviving an attempt on his life just a few years earlier after being shot through the face by burglars, the unfortunate shopkeeper met his demise as he rode from San Angelo to his home. As his hack crossed Pecan Creek, a large gust of wind blew his hat off his head and into the back of the wagon. Uncle Johnnie tried to reach back to retrieve his hat while still driving the hack and suffered a massive heart attack. Hector McKenzie, a close friend of the deceased man, hosted the funeral at his home in San Angelo and his brother-in-law James Weddell served as the executor of John Jones' estate.⁹⁶ Uncle Johnnie's efforts to move the post office to a more convenient location and his work to establish a thriving market in Christoval did much to ensure the vitality of the community. His premature death left a large hole in the fabric of the community.

Due to his adaptability, W. C. managed to weather the severe economic downturn that began in 1893 quite well. Eschewing the sheep industry when government policy seemed to work against the trade proved Jones felt no loyalty toward any particular means of increasing his wealth. The middle of the 1890s, in addition to presenting economic hardship, dealt political firestorms at the ranchers and landholders of western Texas. With political acumen

⁹⁶*San Angelo Standard*, December 18, 1897.

and perseverance, those individuals were able to emerge from the period relatively unscathed. As the decade and the century approached a close, the economic outlook began to increase and optimism permeated the region once again.

CHAPTER V

LEAVING THE WILD WEST BEHIND

After W. C. returned from Wales in the late winter of 1898, his economic activity remained relatively low for a few months. He worked around his South Concho ranch and spent time with Margaret, who did not make the trip across the ocean with him. By that summer, the rancher embarked on a series of major deals unlike anything he had done since the economic panic of 1893. The spark that set off the flurry of activity came in the form of a large sale. In the middle of July, Jones sold his twenty-three section ranch located in Schleicher County to Billie Childress from San Angelo. Transferring 14,720 acres for only \$4,000, W. C. garnered less than thirty cents per acre for the ranch land. The bulk of the deal, however, came from the cattle. Jones sold eleven hundred cattle ranging from one to three years old to Childress for \$21,000.¹ Jones' consolidation of land and cattle holdings allowed him to retain his South Concho ranch and produced a significant amount of cash for later transactions.

During the same week as the sale of his Schleicher County ranch, Jones took an additional step toward providing a solid community atmosphere for the residents of Christoval, thereby making the village a more desirable place to buy land in and around. In consideration of \$20 paid by certain members of the town, W. C. transferred one and one-half acres of land adjacent to the location of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church to build a school. The deed established W. H. Williams, George Holland and J. H. McPherson, the

¹*San Angelo Standard*, July 23, 1898.

trustees of School District Number 5 of Tom Green County, as the administrators of the property. That responsibility would transfer to their successors in the future.² By providing the land for a public school in the town, W. C. increased the convenience of the townspeople's lives considerably.

While establishing a cohesive community in Christoval required little more than land and initiative, the cattle industry still proved to be dangerous and unpredictable for those on the ground. As Jones and his two sons worked to round up the eleven hundred cattle being transferred to Childress, that danger became immediately apparent. While the men held three hundred head of steers in a lane, the animals became startled and stampeded. During the stampede, the cattle destroyed several feet of valuable fence and two of the steers were crippled. Fortunately for Jones and his sons, the steers represented the only injuries.³

Shaken up and distraught about the loss of the fence, Jones soon turned back toward his business. The infusion of cash provided by the Schleicher County land deal allowed W. C. to pay off the mortgage held by the Brown brothers from Austin. The five thousand dollar loan that W. C. and Margaret took on their South Concho ranch beginning in 1889 and renewed in 1894 held a due date in the spring of 1899.⁴ While beneficial during the rough financial times during the Panic, the loan represented the only serious debt that Jones held. Paying off the debt almost a full year early showed that W. C. and his family had recovered from the trying times of the past eight years.

²Tom Green County Deed Records, Book 15, 333.

³*San Angelo Standard*, August 20, 1898.

⁴Tom Green County Deed of Trust, Book N, 169.

After ridding himself of his large land holding in the county adjacent to Tom Green, Jones looked to expanding the size of his South Concho Ranch. His first land purchases since 1891, Jones bought nearly one thousand acres near his already impressive holdings around Christoval. The first of the two transactions took place at the beginning of August. Sold by attorney Joseph Spence, Jr. Survey 86 in the name of Arabella Harrington lay on the west bank of the South Concho River just north of Christoval. Like so many sections of the Fisher-Miller Survey, the 177-acre tract of land came into Spence's possession through a sheriff's sale for unpaid taxes. Jones paid two hundred dollars for the riverfront property, which amounted to \$1.13 per acre.⁵

Jones' second land purchase included eight hundred acres of prime, riverfront property on the South Concho. Consisting of a continuous block of five surveys on the west side of the South Concho River, this acquisition greatly expanded Jones' frontage area. Each of the five tracts of land contained one hundred sixty acres and was originally surveyed as a part of the Fisher-Miller colony. Surveys 890 and 891, laying on the northern edge of the purchased land, were patented in the name of F. Schmitt. Directly south lay Surveys 892 and 893, which were originally patented to Christopher Schmitt at the same time as those issued to F. Schmitt. Because the two Schmitts applied at the same time as single men, they were likely brothers seeking to make a new life away from the old world. The southernmost section, Survey 894, was originally patented to Francis V. Westenbustel, also under the Fisher-Miller plan.⁶ These five sections of land pushed Jones' land holdings on the western

⁵Tom Green County Deed Records, Book 15, 338.

⁶Tom Green County Deed Records, Book 17, 64.

bank of the South Concho farther north, even more so than his land on the eastern bank of the river. Jones paid \$3 per acre to Louis Schwartz and J. C. Raas, operators of a dry goods store in San Angelo.

W. C. and his sister Jane once again planned to take a trip north during the autumn of 1898. During the journey, which began in early September, they ventured to Iowa to visit their sister Elizabeth and Kansas to see their brother John. While traveling around the Central Plains, Jones and his sister attended the Trans-Mississippi Exposition in Omaha, Nebraska. Consisting of thousands exhibits that served to promote the rapidly developing western half of the nation, the exposition represented an exciting stop along their trip. Similar to Jones' boosterism of Christoval, the exposition exuded optimism for the development for the American West and its perceived boundless opportunities.⁷

To celebrate the holiday season, citizens of Christoval gathered at the Cumberland Presbyterian Church on Christmas Eve for their Santa Claus festival. Numerous younger people volunteered to sing Christmas carols with the talented accompaniment of Miss Fannie Ake on the organ. The group sought S. H. Shipley to "impersonate Old Santy, but owing to a ruling of our woman's suffrage club, that gentleman was detained at home with the bairn (child) in order that his better half might reap the benefit of the Xmas festivities." Rebuffed, young women of the party nominated the twenty-year-old Archie Wright, stepson of George Holland, to fill the role of St. Nicholas for the evening.⁸

⁷*San Angelo Standard*, October 15, 1898; Robert W. Rydell, "The Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition: 'To Work Out the Problem of Universal Civilization,'" *American Quarterly* 33, no. 5 (winter 1981): 587-8.

⁸*San Angelo Standard*, December 31, 1898.

James Weddell opened the official festivities with a prayer, followed by a rendition of "Holy Night" by the self-appointed choir. After finishing the song, Wright, dressed as Santa Claus took the stage and began to pass out presents and goodies to the children in attendance. After satisfying the younger crowd, the costumed Wright turned his attention to distributing gifts to adults. W. C. received an elegant gold frame bearing the phrase "By Judas" on a purple background. Will Jones opened his present to find thirty feet of sisal rope tied in a double lover's knot and completely covered in delicate pink ribbons. Jones' neighbor, Dave DeLong, reportedly received a lifetime membership to the South Concho Woman Suffrage Club, inspiring laughter from the rest of the crowd.⁹

The daintily decorated double lover's knot that Will received on Christmas Eve foretold an event that was scheduled to take place just a few days later. On Wednesday, December 28, Will married his sweetheart Belle McCrohan. By this time Will had begun to be known by citizens of Christoval as "one of our most enterprising stockmen," seeking to continue the work of his father. The ceremony took place at the home of Belle's parents and apparently did not include much pageantry.¹⁰ With this ceremony, three of the five Jones children had joined in the bonds of matrimony, leaving just the eldest son Robert and the youngest daughter Lizzie single.

Early the following year Margaret's brother paid her and her sister, Mrs. Sanderson, a visit from the Badger State. Arriving January 17, J. A. Currie intended for his trip to be both social and business in nature. Currie, one of the few of his set of siblings to remain in

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Wisconsin, served as the mayor of the village of Arlington, located in Columbia County. Mayor Currie's business interests in western Texas came about through the persistent boosterism of Jones and his brother-in-law Sanderson, both of whom had done quite well for themselves in Tom Green County. The mayor brought his nephew W. R. Currie with him on the expedition. The young man from Wisconsin enjoyed his time in Texas as the newspaper advertised his presence by announcing him as the "handsome young nephew" of the colonel.¹¹

If the two Wisconsinites thought their January trip to Texas would serve as a relief from the frigid weather of the northern state, they were sorely mistaken. The winter of 1899 proved to be one of the coldest in a decade. In fact, for the first time in over ten years the flowing spring waters of the South Concho River had completely frozen over. Because the event occurred so rarely, residents did not have the normal winter sport equipment. That did not stop many enterprising children and even some adults, however. Through clever ingenuity some of these kids created makeshift skates and sleds. The winter wonderland, despite the occasional "frozen cow or water pipe" proved to be a welcome novelty to most everyone in Christoval.¹²

During the chill of the winter, Robert Jones began working for his brother-in-law James Weddell. James had a considerable sheep operation in the South Concho area. Because Robert remained without a family to tie him down he could endure the isolation and loneliness inherent in watching sheep, so Weddell asked him to care for a flock of three

¹¹*San Angelo Standard*, January 21, 1899.

¹²*San Angelo Standard*, February 18, 1899.

thousand sheep. Robert had the sheep held up in the Field's pasture in Sutton County. Being almost fifty miles from home, Robert spent a considerable amount of time in Sonora gathering supplies for the job, garnering him attention in the town's newspaper, in part due to the regional fame of his father.¹³

As spring thawed the frozen South Concho, W. C. participated in a few land transactions. The first saw Jones reacquiring a fifty acre irrigated farm that he had sold to G. W. Lane in 1891. Consisting of land in Surveys 77 and 79, Jones paid C. A. Probandt \$1,150 for the farm. The original transaction between Jones and Lane in 1891 amounted to \$2,250 so the net result of the deal provided Jones with a healthy profit. Lane transferred the land to Probandt three years after he purchased it from Jones.¹⁴ The timing of that sale pointed to the difficulty Lane had earning enough money to pay off his land debt during the Panic. Probandt worked as a merchant in San Angelo allowing him to take the land off Lane's hands.

Aside from providing land for a schoolhouse and a graveyard, six full years had passed since Jones sold his last lot in Christoval. Yet another indicator that the economic recovery had begun to find its way into the South Concho region came in the continuation of those sales. Jones sold a one-quarter acre lot to Mrs. C. A. McCarty for \$25. This sale marked the first in several years, and was the only town lot Jones sold in 1899.¹⁵ In fact, this

¹³*San Angelo Standard*, February 11, 1899.

¹⁴Tom Green County Deed Records, Book 15, 487.

¹⁵Tom Green County Deed Records, Book 20, 204.

sale to McCarty would be the last until after the turn of the century when the lots really begin to sale with the vigor Jones saw during the early 1890s.

The third and final land deal from 1899 held a particular significance for the Jones family. With Robert being twenty-seven years old and Will one year younger and married, W. C. decided to sell the brothers a large portion of his South Concho land holdings. The portion of land W. C. sold his sons amounted to somewhat less than three thousand acres all together. Because the transaction took place between trusted family members, the details of the deal remained relatively informal. Whereas earlier generations of landholders regarded the South Concho River as a natural demarcation line between parcels, the new highway that connected San Angelo and Sonora cut its way through existing property lines. Jones chose to retain the portions of the surveys he sold to his sons that lay on the western side of the road. Robert and Will took charge of the eastern portions of Surveys 73, 75, 77, 79 and 1827 for \$3,000. In addition to retaining the portion of the James Eldridge Survey that lay on the eastern side of the road, Jones exempted the lots already carved from the land to create Christoval as well as an additional fourteen acres for additional growth of the town.¹⁶

While Jones helped solidify his sons' connection to the South Concho region, one of his daughters decided to move from the area. James and Sadie Weddell sold their 1,400-acre pasture south of the Jones ranch to W. J. Jemeyson for just under \$8,000. Jemeyson came to Tom Green County from Granger, Texas, and sought to stock his newly acquired ranch with a large number of cattle. Weddell included a thirty acre irrigated farm that would serve to

¹⁶Tom Green County Deed Records, Book 15, 488.

help Jemeyson diversify his agricultural earnings.¹⁷ Sadie and James looked to return to James' land in the North Concho region near Water Valley. Years later Sadie attributed droughts and thieves as the main reasons for selling the South Concho ranch and returning to the northern portion of the county.¹⁸ The raid on Weddell's herders' camp and the assault on the late John Jones influenced their decision.

For the third year in a row, W. C. took an extended journey away from home. Again he opted to visit relatives in the Midwest portion of the country. The "pleasure trip," as he called it, started in the middle of July with a train ride to Kansas City, Missouri. From there, Jones called upon family in both Wisconsin and Kansas. During the two-month tour, he also ventured as far as South Dakota for unstated reasons. Despite being in the middle of the summer, the transplanted Texan needed to "borrow an overcoat while in South Dakota."¹⁹ Indeed that September in Sioux Falls, the low temperature fell to a bone chilling thirteen degrees.²⁰

At sixty years old, with three of his children having children of their own, W. C. witnessed the dawn of the twentieth century with his eyes still on the horizon. As a testament to his continual ingenuity, Jones purchased Tom Green County's first pear burner. A fantastic innovation for a region stricken with periodic stretches of drought, the pear burner converted hostile prickly pear cactus into an abundant source of nutrition for livestock. As

¹⁷*San Angelo Standard*, February 4, 1899.

¹⁸Sadie Jones Weddell, interviewed by Sadie Weddell Puckitt.

¹⁹*San Angelo Standard*, September 9, 1899.

²⁰National Weather Service, Weather Forecast Office, "South Dakota Weather History and Trivia, September," <http://www.crh.noaa.gov/fsd/?n=fsdtrivia09> (accessed February 16, 2014).

the name suggests, the pear burner functioned like a flamethrower to burn off the thorns of the cactus, which would cause injury to livestock, making the succulent cactus edible.

In the final weeks of January 1900, Jones touted his purchase of the burner. Within a week, a testimonial by Jones appeared in the newspaper praising the benefits of the device. Having claimed that his ranch was in fantastic condition with his stock in fine shape, Jones stated, "The prickly pear is an excellent diet for cattle, the stock eat it greedily and it is very nutritious, something like turnips, and besides the plant can sustain a great deal of dry weather."²¹ W. C. continued by claiming the cost for the oil required to operate the machine amounted to only about one dollar per day, making it an economical choice for supplementing the cattle's diet. Finally, in his most grandiose claim about the remarkable gadget, Jones suggested that the ingestion of prickly pear likely served to prevent blackleg (a flesh-eating bacteria) in calves.²²

Will and his father, having worked to breed quality horses for many years now turned to Claud Anson and his brother William as buyers for their stock. The Anson brothers were the sons of a noble family from England, but due to the law of primogenitor, they had no opportunity to wield the official title or inherit the estate. Because of this, three of the brothers made their way to the ranchland of western Texas to carve new lives for themselves far from their homeland. However, they did not sever ties to their country, and by the turn of the century, the Anson brothers had secured a contract for purchasing numerous Texas horses

²¹*San Angelo Standard*, February 11, 1900.

²²*San Angelo Standard*, March 3, 1900.

for the English army engaged in the Second Boer War.²³ The Joneses drove a large number of their horses to San Angelo on February 26 to capitalize on the purchasing effort of the Ansons.²⁴

Later in the spring, Jones' only brother, John H. Jones, arrived in Texas from Kansas to invest in land and cattle at his brother's behest. W. C. transferred one-half interest in nearly one thousand head of cattle ranging from two years old and up. In addition to the cattle, John purchased interest in fifteen horses as well as the twenty-two section pasture in Schleicher County. The total investment for John amounted to just over twelve thousand dollars. John's seventeen-year-old son Frank came with him from Kansas to assist in managing his new ranching outfit. By that summer, Frank lived on the Schleicher County ranch with Robert, working as a ranch laborer.²⁵

Robert decided to shift away from the Tom Green County operation to focus on building one of his own in Schleicher County. He patented seven sections of school land in the north-central section of his adopted county. Schleicher County at the turn of the century represented a sort of blank slate when compared to its northern neighbor. The sparsely populated region, though separated as a stand-alone county, still functioned under the jurisdiction of Menard County to the east. Further solidifying Robert's shift in focus to Schleicher County he sold his half interest in the South Concho ranch back to his father just a

²³Kevin Robert Thornton, "American Citizens' Involvement in South Africa during the Second Boer War" (master's thesis, Angelo State University, 2012), 29-30.

²⁴*San Angelo Standard*, March 3, 1900.

²⁵*San Angelo Standard*, April 28, 1900; Twelfth Census of the United States: 1900-Population, Schleicher County, Texas, Supervisor's District 5, Enumeration District 122, Sheet 1.

year after the initial transaction. Robert managed to squeeze a small profit out of the deal, garnering \$300 more than he paid W. C. in 1899.²⁶

With his investment secure in the hands of his son and nephew, John looked to return to his home in Kansas in June of 1900. As John worked out his plans to return home, W. C. and Jane discussed with him the possibility of traveling together. Once again, Jones felt the desire to journey out of Texas and because of the dawn of the new century thought the trip ought to be quite extraordinary. On June 5, the three siblings boarded a train to travel north to Kansas. John had not yet decided how far he would accompany his brother and sister on their adventure at the time of their departure. Along the way, the trio ventured to the Iowa home of a fourth sibling, Elizabeth Humphrey, who along with her daughter Teresa joined the entourage. Finally after picking up their sister Mary from Wisconsin the family prepared for their adventure—a trip to the 1900 Paris Exposition.²⁷

After a spending a few weeks in England, the group caught the 8 p.m. train out of London Bridge station destined for New Haven. From there they boarded an overnight ferry for Dieppe in France. Once in Paris the six Americans failed to find the guide they hired to escort them around the metropolis. Exhausted from the trip, the group "finally took the omnibus (which are very unlike the American) and went to the hotel." After a short rest at the hotel, they ventured to the Exposition, which covered a vast amount of space when compared to past Parisian Expos. Of the forty separate entrance gates, Jones and his family opted to use "the gate of the Place de la Concorde, which represents the main entrance and is

²⁶*San Angelo Standard*, May 19, 1900.

²⁷*San Angelo Standard*, October 27, 1900.

so arranged as to enable 30,000 persons to pass per hour. It consists of three enormous arches forming a triangle and supporting a dome, the top of which rises thirty metres [*sic*] above the ground. Each side of the gate is decorated by two spires and every Friday night it is illuminated by twelve large arc lamps and 3,110 incandescent lamps incased in colored glass.”²⁸ The entryway represented a remarkable spectacle for the inhabitants of the rural, central portion of the United States. The city of lights truly lived up to its name during the exposition.

The clan happened upon the *Rue des Nations*, where they chose to spend the balance of the afternoon. Among the several nations represented along the path was the United States. Those who designed the building sought for it to look like a scaled down version of the nation’s capital building in Washington. Unfortunately, the large domed building they produced offered a “rather severe style.” The interior of the building looked like a clubroom outfitted with an abundance of star-spangled banners and functioned as a post office for visitors. Despite the general disappointment felt by Americans at the display, many enjoyed the fact that others from across the ocean had congregated there, providing an opportunity to converse in their native tongue.²⁹

During his weeklong tour of the French capital, Jones saw the Arc de Triumph, Versailles, the tomb of Napoleon at *Les Invalides*, and the Notre Dame Cathedral. Although it made its debut at the 1889 Paris Exposition, the Eiffel Tower stood out as an amazing feat of engineering to the Americans who were seeing it for the first time. After the group

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

reached the top of the tower, Teresa Humphrey remarked, "The city of Paris appears little more than a map." Though experiencing the Palace of Electricity, the Panorama of the world, the Swiss Village, the Big Wheel and the Palace of Light, the family lamented the missed opportunity of visiting the Corn Kitchen.³⁰ This exhibit, sponsored by agricultural interests in the United States, served, without charge, all sorts of foods made from corn: corn soup, corn fritters, corn cakes, and corn syrup. The French who experienced the cuisine thought it odd to eat a food they "feed only to beasts."³¹

W. C. and Jane returned to Texas in early October after having spent four months across the Atlantic Ocean. Jones only spent a week in Paris, however. The bulk of his trip involved touring England, Ireland, and Wales. His sons eagerly awaited his arrival home, as several deals transpired within just a few weeks of Jones' homecoming. Robert and Will bought their father's half interest in the land and cattle of the Schleicher County ranch. This meant Robert and Will together owned half of the ranch that their uncle John had purchased earlier in the year. To further entangle their partnerships, Will sold his brother half of his half interest in the Christoval ranch. The net result of these deals left Robert and Will as junior partners in two ranches, one held by W. C. in Tom Green County and the other held by John in Schleicher County.³²

As the first year of the twentieth century closed, the town of Christoval experienced a growth spurt. Donthitt and McCrohan began construction on the village's first two-story

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ *Amador Ledger*, Jackson, California, July 20, 1900.

³² *San Angelo Standard*, November 10, 1900.

building. The men would run their firm out of the first floor and allow the second story to be occupied by Woodmen of the World, Christoval Camp No. 1013. The fraternal lodge hoped to have their new accommodations completed by their first regular meeting of the year, scheduled for the Thursday night before the full moon in February. In addition to the construction of the town's largest building, Jones sold a significant number of town lots during 1901. Indeed, more lots sold in 1901 than all the years combined since 1892, excluding lots deemed for public use.³³

Jones' sister Jane bought one of the lots, a full acre, at the cost of \$100. Jane lived with W. C. and Margaret, so this purchase represented an opportunity for the unmarried forty-two-year-old woman to supplement her income through rental properties. She decided to build two houses on her one-acre plot of land. In early October, she hired the crew to begin clearing the trees and shrubs from half of the lot, with the intention of continuing the process until both of her houses were complete. The fact that W. C. managed to sell five lots and his sister saw fit to build two rental homes in the town indicated the bustling nature of the South Concho region following the turn of the century. Much of this economic activity resulted from the growing sense of opportunity in Schleicher County to the south. Christoval lay directly between San Angelo and Eldorado. The relatively new town of Eldorado, by 1901, had several prominent citizens petitioning to have the outpost declared the seat of Schleicher County.³⁴

³³*San Angelo Standard*, January 19, 1901; Tom Green County Deed Records, Book 20, 24, 34, 122, 202; Tom Green County Deed Records, Book 22, 448.

³⁴*San Angelo Standard*, October 12, 1901; *A History of Schleicher County, Texas*, 584.

Optimism for the prospects of the village permeated from several aspects of town life. In 1901 one booster for the town wrote, "Christoval is still improving at a lively pace and is attracting considerable attention as an ideal place of residence." The author went on to boast about the fantastic school and church services available, as well as the people and the beauty of the South Concho region. Additionally, the individual who purchased the late Uncle Johnnie's merchandise outfit sold the store to the well-established Cox Brothers from San Angelo. The new owners immediately hired a group of carpenters to expand their new location. Christoval's expansion had occurred at such a rapid pace in 1901 that W. C. chose to shift his pasture fence back several hundred yards to accommodate the growth. This move prompted one local to remark, "Christoval is no longer 'only a wide place in the road.'"³⁵

Christoval was not the only thing growing, however. On June 20, 1901, Robert and Lee Stidham "were united in 'the tie that binds.'" Lee moved to the South Concho region with her parents, James Washington and Martha Ann Stidham. James passed away in 1890, leaving his wife and young daughters behind. Mrs. Stidham purchased a small irrigated farm from Jones not long after the death of her husband. Martha died only a few years later, leaving Lee and her sister Hattie to live with relatives in the area. Lee and Robert had been spending a considerable amount of time together at Hackberry, near the Tom Green and Schleicher border. Hackberry had become a place where young people in the area met to dance until the wee hours of the morning. On several occasions both Robert and Lee attended the dances in Hackberry.³⁶

³⁵*San Angelo Standard*, November 23, 1901.

³⁶*San Angelo Standard*, June 22, 1901; *San Angelo Standard*, March 3, 1900.

The winter of 1902 proved to be tough for the health of many inhabitants of Christoval. Bell Jones, Will's wife, became stricken with a serious case of pneumonia during the opening weeks of the year. The illness left the young mother bedridden for several days. Both her mother Mrs. McCrohan and Margaret stayed at her bedside to assist in her recovery and to make sure her children were well cared for. Bell's bout of pneumonia came just days after her adult brother John recovered from his own attack of the dangerous illness. In addition to the cases of pneumonia, many individuals in the town had contracted la grippe (the flu). The combination of the two afflictions ensured Dr. Charles Murphy stayed busy traveling from town to ranch attending to his various calls.³⁷

General discussion in the region pertained to the continuing growth of the hamlet of Christoval. In the early spring, the new Holland Hotel boasted of the fact that they had few vacancies. Its competition the Cobb Hotel worked quickly to add four more rooms and complete a general renovation before the busy summer season. Additionally, many began to speak of the importance of an iron bridge to span the South Concho River at Christoval. The difficulty many freighters experienced while attempting to cross the often swiftly moving overflow at the low water crossing had forced some to bypass the north-south corridor for other trade routes. This resulted in a significant loss of trade from Sonora and Eldorado, ultimately leaving Christoval with fewer visitors and less commerce.³⁸

Despite the continuing prospect of growth, W. C. recorded only one land transaction for the entire year. Jones donated one-quarter of an acre of land in Christoval to the Ladies'

³⁷*San Angelo Standard*, January 18, 1902.

³⁸*San Angelo Standard*, March 15, 1902; *San Angelo Standard*, January 25, 1902.

Aid Society of the South Concho Congregation of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church for one dollar. Ladies' Aid Societies functioned as both a social organization and a social safety net in the years predating the advent of Social Security at the federal level. Comprised of the women from the more financially secure families in the church, the society assisted widowed mothers with young children and elderly individuals who lacked the means to take care of themselves. Mrs. C. A. McCarty, Jane Jones, and Margaret Jones served as the appointed trustees of the property.³⁹

As a newly married man, Robert Jones began to appear in the newspaper often during the early parts of 1902. Indeed, by this time the young rancher had made quite a name for himself as an up-and-coming stockman working in Schleicher County. Along with his father and brother, Robert purchased thirty high-grade Hereford bulls from J. J. Rhodes in San Angelo. The hard work undoubtedly came from the knowledge that his wife would soon give birth to their son, Robert Currie Jones, Jr. Lee gave birth to a healthy nine-pound boy on April 26, 1902. The happy couple announced Junior's arrival just a few months before their first anniversary.⁴⁰

To continue the celebratory mood of the expansion of his family and the town he built, Jones again chose to host a magnificent Fourth of July celebration on his pasture by the river. Individuals from San Angelo and many surrounding communities attended the all-day party. The celebration included a massive barbeque dinner, served with all of the usual

³⁹Tom Green County Deed Records, Book 20, 197; Rex R. Campbell, Mary Campbell, and Coleen Hughes, *A Revolution in the Heartland: Changes in Rural Culture, Family and Communities 1900-2000*. (Columbia, MO: Extension Publications, 2003), 105.

⁴⁰*San Angelo Standard*, May 10, 1902.

fixings. In addition to ingesting large quantities of meat, the group congregated at the platform built under the "shade of myriad trees. The dancing began at noon and continued without intermission throughout the afternoon and night, and was most thoroughly enjoyed by all participants." Unfortunately, the day did not pass without incident. An individual hired by W. C. to help with the massive cooking effort imbibed a bit too much liquor. While walking toward the fire pit, the intoxicated cook shoved a woman out of his way. This prompted a severe reaction from a bystander who "in good old Texas style knocked him down and came very near sending him to the 'happy land of Caanan' before he was prepared to go." The overzealous reveler remained unconscious for several hours after the altercation, "but the chances are that he will be all right again by the next Fourth of July."⁴¹

The generally congenial setting of the South Concho region began to unravel just a few weeks prior to the Independence Day celebration. During the waning days of May, W. H. Williams, F. C. Mires, and G. M. Holland appeared before a notary public official in Tom Green County to construct an affidavit of non-settlement against W. C. Jones' youngest daughter, Lizzie Jones. Back in March of 1901, Lizzie applied for and purchased four sections of land in Schleicher County. Her application explicitly stated that she meant to purchase the lands as a settler. The Texas General Land Office favored applicants for school land who sought to settle the land because they would bolster the sparsely populated regions of the state. Furthermore, the state hoped to prevent rampant speculation and mass

⁴¹*San Angelo Standard*, July 12, 1902.

accumulation of land by cattle barons.⁴² Lizzie, in her affidavit for purchase, asserted she was not "acting in collusion with others for the purpose of buying the land for any other person or corporation."⁴³ However, the land abutted Robert Jones' pasture, serving to supplement Robert's land holdings. Williams, Mires, and Holland stated they knew Lizzie well and had lived in the same neighborhood as her father for many years. If Lizzie had moved from the neighborhood to settle on land in Schleicher County, then the South Concho community would have been aware of her absence. Because the land she purchased in Schleicher County required her to be a settler, "such purchase is known to be fraudulent."⁴⁴

By the first week of June, Lizzie had received notice of the affidavit of non-settlement filed against her. The land office, upon receiving the complaint, allowed Lizzie thirty days to respond to the allegation. Three individuals came forward to suggest that she had, in fact, made an effort to settle on the four sections in good faith. Fred Bohne, William Honig, and Robert Jones supplied Lizzie with her affidavits of settlement. Bohne and Jones offered simple, identical statements with the only specific piece of information being the date of Lizzie's move to Schleicher County. Honig, however, elaborated by stating he resides four

⁴²R. D. Holt, "School Land Rushes in West Texas," *West Texas Historical Association Year Book* 10 (1934): 42.

⁴³ Application and Affidavit to Purchase as an Actual Settler, File 66596, Schleicher County School Land, Archives and Records Program, Texas General Land Office, Austin.

⁴⁴ Affidavit of Non-settlement, File 66596, Schleicher County School Land, Archives and Records Program, Texas General Land Office, Austin.

miles from "the house owned by Miss Lizzie Jones" and "that she is running her cattle on said land and that he has seen her at her house."⁴⁵

While the conflicting reports provide no real insight into the situation, examining newspaper articles help determine Lizzie's actual residence during the year leading to the affidavits. The first mention of Lizzie after her application as a settler in Schleicher County reports "W. C. Jones and Misses Jane and Lizzie, of South Concho, are attending the Fife meeting" in June of 1901.⁴⁶ In November 1901, Lizzie received Mr. and Mrs. Harry Jackson from Rudd in northeastern Schleicher County at her home in Christoval.⁴⁷ In February 1902, Lizzie attended an oyster supper in support of the Woodman of the World in Christoval but the article does not mention where she lived.⁴⁸ Conversely, during the same period the newspaper tells of Robert coming in from the Schleicher County ranch to visit Christoval.⁴⁹ In a small community with many people reporting the actions of its citizens, especially its prominent members, Lizzie Jones could not have moved to Schleicher County as a settler with no mention of that fact in the newspaper.

Eldorado resident Archie Wright held interest the land Lizzie Jones purchased. Wright settled a camp on the land with his half-brother Jim Holland. The affidavits of non-settlement came at the behest of Archie, each of the men either being friend or family

⁴⁵ William Honig Affidavit of Settlement, File 66596, Schleicher County School Land, Archives and Records Program, Texas General Land Office, Austin.

⁴⁶*San Angelo Standard*, June 29, 1901.

⁴⁷*San Angelo Standard*, November 23, 1901.

⁴⁸*San Angelo Standard*, February 22, 1902.

⁴⁹*San Angelo Standard*, March 1, 1902.

member. In fact, Wright's stepfather George Holland authored one of the affidavits. George owned the Holland Hotel in Christoval, and served as an integral member of the town. Much like Robert Jones, Archie ventured south from his family's home near Christoval to make a life for himself in the relatively undeveloped town of Eldorado. At the time of his arrival, Schleicher County functioned under the government in Menard County. Though the Texas legislature determined to create the county in 1887, the region boasted too few inhabitants to establish its own government. Upon his arrival in Eldorado, Wright began working for W. B. Silliman, a wealthy and powerful individual in the area. Silliman and other ranchers recruited Archie to circulate a petition that sought to create a separate government for Schleicher with Eldorado as the seat. Wright successfully gathered the requisite number of qualified signatures; in 1901, the residents of Schleicher County held their first election for county officials.⁵⁰

Wright came from a prominent, well-respected South Concho family. In fact, Archie and Robert grew up together, attended school at the same time, and worked together on occasion. The two men were listed among the several revelers at one of the many Hackberry monthly dances that took place during the spring of 1900.⁵¹ Aside from their proximity, however, there is no evidence if the two men held any sort of animosity toward each other but they never appeared particularly friendly either. All that can be stated with certainty is the two men knew each other for many years. In fact, Robert, along with his father and

⁵⁰ R. D. Holt, ed. *Schleicher County or Eighty Years of Development in Southwest Texas* (Eldorado, TX: Success, 1930), 82; Vivian Elizabeth Smyrl, "Schleicher County," *Handbook of Texas Online* (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/hcs06>).

⁵¹ *San Angelo Standard*, July 12, 1902; *San Angelo Standard*, March 3, 1900.

brother, sold Archie and his two brothers a one-quarter acre lot in Christoval in March 1901 for twenty dollars.⁵²

On the morning of July 9, 1902, just before the sun rose above the horizon, Robert Jones rode his horse among the rolling hills of the contested land in northern Schleicher County. In the distance he saw the fire of Archie's camp. Robert wearily approached the campsite. As Jones reached the encampment, he noticed Wright stooping down by his tent. Without warning Archie raised his Winchester rifle and fired. The shot hit Robert in his chest after traveling through his horse's head. While his mount reared up and threw him, Robert managed to fire one shot wildly in the air. After he hit the ground, Wright fired another four rounds until he saw the young rancher was dead.⁵³

No one will know exactly what transpired that day, but some evidence suggests that Robert approached the camp intending to intimidate or harass Wright. Archie had worked to undermine Robert's claim by proxy to land that helped complete an eleven-section pasture. Without the four sections Lizzie purchased, certain parts of the pasture would be isolated from the rest. Two of the sections were bisected with Robert owning one-half and Lizzie owning the other. Retaining access to Lizzie's land would be a paramount concern for the success of the pasture. An odd statement by W. C. that the *Standard* printed at the end of the article about Robert's death revealed that Robert might have had ill intentions that morning. W. C. asserted, "His son visited Wright's camp the day his was killed for the purpose of

⁵²Tom Green County Deed Records, Book 21, 12.

⁵³*San Angelo Standard*, July 12, 1902.

paying Wright and his hired man some money due on road tax."⁵⁴ First, Jones acknowledged that Robert knew of Wright's camp and its location. More importantly, the claim that Robert went to the camp before sunrise to pay a tax to a man who sought to disrupt Robert's economic well-being makes little sense.

After the incident, Wright and Holland rode their horses to the home of their uncle, Bob Lowe, in Christoval to call for the sheriff. Wright's uncle arrived at the Christoval phone office at around nine o'clock to place the call. As Lowe turned to leave, he saw W. C. enjoying his morning coffee in front of the store. Lowe approached the sixty-two-year-old rancher and told him of his son's fate. Upon hearing the news, "the old gentleman stood the unexpected shock with heroic fortitude. With but a slight tremor in his voice, he asked a few questions, got on his horse and rode rapidly home, about a mile north of town." Within thirty minutes W. C., Margaret, Lizzie, and Jane rushed back through town in their carriage on their way to the scene of the shooting. A large caravan of friends and relatives followed the Joneses to offer their support and to see the ghastly sight. Will rode alongside his family on horseback, passing the group in order to arrive at his late brother's body first.⁵⁵

Meanwhile Wright waited at his uncle's home for the arrival of the authorities. Constable Dick Runyon reached Christoval by noon, but quickly announced he had no authority over the incident since it took place in Schleicher County. Eventually the officer from Eldorado arrived and took Wright into custody. Archie remained in jail in Eldorado until his July 14 habeas corpus hearing in San Angelo. Schleicher County Sheriff Henry

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵*San Angelo Standard*, July 12, 1902.

Mills escorted Wright the forty-five miles to the Tom Green County courthouse. Quite a crowd had assembled at the courthouse hoping to hear the evidence against Wright. Instead of a show, the attorneys for the two sides to set Wright's bail at \$3,000 without examination. With that announcement, Jim Cochran, George Holland, Will Ellis and Jim DeLong volunteered as sureties, allowing Archie to walk free until the trial began.⁵⁶

Four months after the incident, Wright again stood before the court with his six sureties for his bond to hear his formal charges. Archie Wright, on November 25, 1902, found himself officially accused of the murder of Robert Jones. With his bond secured by multiple sources, Wright freely left the courtroom that autumn day to await the actual trial. As with any criminal prosecution, the state's attorneys took a considerable amount of time preparing for the trial. One year after the indictment hearing the court convened again with the task of assembling a jury for Wright's trial. The court sent thirty-six summons to jurors, ordering them to appear at the Schleicher County Courthouse on December 2, 1903. On that day in December, rather than beginning the litigation for Wright's murder trial, the state's attorney filed a motion to dismiss the case due to a lack of evidence.⁵⁷ After a year of investigation, the prosecutor could not overcome the obstacle that the only witness to the shooting was the stepbrother to the shooter. Wright walked away a free man.

To make matters worse, Wright's civil lawsuit against Lizzie continued to run concurrently with Wright's criminal trial. The first date recorded came one day after the court issued the formal indictment for Wright in November 1902. Both parties agreed to a

⁵⁶*San Angelo Standard*, July 19, 1902.

⁵⁷Schleicher County District Court Minutes, Book 1, 38, 63- 65.

continuance, waiting to see the outcome of the criminal trial.⁵⁸ Just one day before the state dropped the charge against Archie, the district court convened to hear civil case number twenty-seven, A. T. Wright versus Lizzie Jones. A jury of twelve men from Schleicher County delivered a verdict in favor of Wright, awarding him the four sections of land. Two days later, after Wright's acquittal from the murder charge, Lizzie's attorney filed a motion for a new trial. Judge J. W. Timmons denied that motion, which immediately prompted Jones to give notice of appeal.⁵⁹

Regardless of the circumstances surrounding the shooting, the death of their oldest son, just as he started a family of his own, devastated W. C. and Margaret. Family lore states Margaret suffered so much from the loss of her son that she compelled W. C. to sell off much of his land and move away from Christoval.⁶⁰ Robert's death marked the beginning of a long process that resulted in the Joneses making their home in San Angelo. However, during the ensuing two years, a few more events influenced Jones' decision to move away from Christoval. At least one year following the court's decision to allow Wright to walk away without punishment for killing Robert, W. C. continued with his usual modes of business without any indication that he intended to make a major change.

For Jones, the resumption of business, meant dealing in both cattle and land. In September, W. C. shipped two railroad cars of "fat cattle" to Tol Cawley, who in turn,

⁵⁸Schleicher County District Court Minutes, Book 1, 46.

⁵⁹Schleicher County District Court Minutes, Book 1, 67.

⁶⁰ Alice Sisco, interview by author, San Angelo, Texas, March 11, 2013.

shipped them off to market.⁶¹ During a trip to visit his daughter and son-in-law, Sadie and James Weddell, in Water Valley, Jones found the opportunity to supplement his cattle holdings. Jones purchased twenty feeder bulls from the Currie Bros. firm at private terms. Continuing his purchase streak, Jones left Rappleye's ranch with fifteen feeders and bought thirty of the stock animals from his son-in-law.⁶² While resuming his active trading in the cattle industry, Jones also continued dealing in Christoval town lots.

As 1901 represented the beginning of a period of growth for Christoval, 1903 saw that trend enhanced. Over the course of 1903, W. C. sold ten lots ranging in size from one-quarter of an acre to one acre. Though Jones sold a few of the lots to repeat customers who sought to expand their holdings, overall eight individuals invested in land in the expanding town. Almost without exception, W. C. sold the land in town at the rate of \$100 per acre. The eight people purchased from Jones five acres for a total of \$550. Remarkably, the amount of money W. C. earned off those five acres nearly allowed him to recover the entire cost of the 640-acre section of land from which he carved Christoval.⁶³

In addition to the ten town lots, Jones sold a piece of pasture to a relative newcomer to the South Concho region. In 1902 William Anson, the man who helped facilitate England's efforts to buy Texas horses for the Boer War, purchased the Head of the River Ranch from the Berrendo Stock Company. Berrendo had been Jones' neighbor to the south

⁶¹*San Angelo Standard*, September 6, 1902.

⁶²*San Angelo Standard*, November 22, 1902.

⁶³Tom Green County Deed Records, Book 23, 459, 469 & 639; Tom Green County Deed Records, Book 25, 144 & 593; Tom Green County Deed Records, Book 27, 463-4 & 542; Tom Green County Deed Records, Book 31, 471; Tom Green County Deed Records, Book 44, 40; Tom Green County Deed Records, Book 72, 449.

for many years, the two parties having had several business interactions and lawsuits. Jones sold to Anson the southern 274 acres of Survey 1008. The piece of property jutted into the Englishman's newly acquired ranch. Laying on the eastern side of the South Concho River the isolated land served little use for Jones, whose property mostly lay on the western side of the river and along its banks.⁶⁴

Some time after the original ruling in the civil trial of A. T. Wright versus Lizzie Jones, Lizzie moved out to the ranch to fulfill her obligation as an actual settler, hoping to improve her chance to reverse the lower court's ruling. As late as September of 1902, she still resided at her father's home near Christoval. In that month, she and her sister-in-law, Bell Jones, took a trip to visit the Schleicher County ranch.⁶⁵ This news of visitation came just two months after she initially lost the land to Wright. Because the case remained pending in the legal system, Lizzie had not lost access to the property. By March of 1903, however, she had moved to her ranch and spent only a few days in Christoval to visit her mother and father.

Shortly after Lizzie's visit, W. C. ventured to the Indian Territory to look after a large number of cattle he pastured there. Jones had not traveled to the Territory since 1894, when he went with Robert to sell off a large number of cattle. This time around, W. C. met up with Will, who had been in the area for about three months tending to his and his father's cattle. While there, W. C. liquidated half of his stock in the Indian Nation and returned to his South

⁶⁴Tom Green County Deed Records, Book 24, 449.

⁶⁵*San Angelo Standard*, September 20, 1902.

Concho home after just about a month. Will, however, stayed in the area for a few weeks longer, not returning until the middle of October.

While the death of Robert and the injustice involved in his death and the potential loss of Lizzie's land to the very man who took his life served as a catalyst for the Jones' move from Christoval, the tipping point came at the end of 1903, shortly after Will returned from the Indian Territory. On December 7, 1903, Will Jones made a public statement in the *San Angelo Standard* disavowing any involvement in a shooting incident. Some man or group of men shot at Bill Chaney, a cousin of Robert's widow, Lee. An unnamed individual placed a call to authorities in San Angelo and suggested Will accompanied the shooter during this assault. In response, Will stated, "I want my name kept out of the scrape. The man or men who were in the fuss are well-known to Bill Chaney, and the cause thereof."⁶⁶

Bill Chaney went to court to testify to the grand jury about the shooting during the December 1903 term of the district court. The grand jury handed down an indictment for Dave Atkins for assault with the intent to murder Chaney.⁶⁷ Atkins had recently returned to Tom Green County after a five-year stint as a fugitive for the murder of Tom Hardin in a Knickerbocker, Texas, saloon in 1897. The outlaw returned to the region because he had abandoned his young wife and child to maintain his freedom. Meanwhile, Chaney had put together a small group of men to rob the San Angelo-Sonora stage. Learning Atkins had returned, Chaney asked him to join in on the endeavor, but Atkins refused. Weeks later, the

⁶⁶*San Angelo Standard*, December 12, 1903.

⁶⁷Tom Green County District Criminal Court Case 1485, Bill of Indictment.

two men saw each other in a pasture, resulting in the shootout. Atkins soon fled western Texas again, eventually turning himself in for the 1897 murder twenty-three years later.⁶⁸

With brigands and outlaws roaming the pastures surrounding Christoval, Margaret and W. C., decided the time had come for them to move to a more civilized setting. Just like James and Sadie Weddell, Jones would begin the process of moving his family home, which he had maintained in the South Concho region since 1878, in response to the violence of the still untamed South Concho River. Christoval and the South Concho region just seemed too unsafe. W. C. and Margaret were both sixty-four years old and saw the merit of abandoning the place that boasted so much theft and violence perpetrated by men half their age.

Not long after this public announcement by his son, Jones attempted to sell a significant portion of his land. As with many large land deals, the local newspaper reported the amount of land involved, the price per acre, and the two parties. This transaction purported to be major, with W. C. parting with six sections of land he had patented in addition to a section of leased land to J. S. Dabney at the rate of \$3.20 per acre on the patented land. The sale to Dabney included a house, a ninety acre irrigated farm and a lot in Christoval. To pay for the ranch, Dabney traded his home in San Angelo to Jones. Something, however, went wrong in the execution of the transaction, which land agents Felix Mann and J. I. Huffman attempted to negotiate.⁶⁹ Though the *Standard* made a full report, the deed never found its way to the county clerk, thus no land actually exchanged hands.

⁶⁸ "Surrenders for Crime of Youth," *Los Angeles Times*, February 16, 1920.

⁶⁹ *San Angelo Standard*, February 27, 1904.

Despite the failure of this sale, Jones began to show receptivity to the prospect of selling his South Concho land in much larger parcels.

In the midst of this effort to abandon Christoval, W. C. and Will filed a lawsuit against the Gulf, Colorado and Santa Fe Railway (GC&SF) company. Jones and his son sought to recover \$5,199 in damages they alleged the GC&SF caused to their cattle during two separate shipments in April 1903. On April 10, Jones sent the first shipment of 1,039 cattle from San Angelo to Elgin, Kansas. During the trip, forty head of cattle died and another fifteen disappeared. The second trip a week later saw the deaths of seventeen cattle out of the four hundred fifty shipped. Jones placed the reasonable market value for the lost cattle at twenty dollars per head for those that died. Additionally, Jones asserted that the cattle that arrived in Elgin were injured enough to affect their market value by three dollars.⁷⁰

The neglect the luckless livestock endured came from several sources along their six hundred mile journey north, according to Jones. First, the railroad workers failed to load the cattle in the railcars within a reasonable time, waiting instead for thirty-six hours with the cattle bunched up in insufficiently sized holding pens. The cars the defendants provided for Jones' cattle were defective and outdated, with nails and spikes causing the bovine along the sides of the cars severe harm. As the trip began, W. C. asserted the operator of the train showed neglect by "jerking and jamming the cars together" causing the animals to slam into the ends of their containers. Finally, during the journey, the defendants forced the cattle to

⁷⁰Tom Green County Civil Court Records, W. C. Jones and Will C. Jones vs. GC&SF 1416, Petition of the plaintiffs.

remain in the cramped cars for many hours while the train remained at switching stations and failed to feed, water and rest the animals appropriately.⁷¹

W. C. and Will received their compensation less than a year later. By February 7, 1905, the assistant attorney for the GC&SF wrote Judge Joseph Spence, Jr. asking for the court to confirm when the plaintiffs received their restitution from the railroad. Additionally, the lawyer asked for the court to send bill for the relevant court costs his company needed to pay since the ruling went against them. Interestingly, during the trial the GC&SF attorneys issued a subpoena for George Holland, Bob Lowe, Fred Mires, and Archie Wright to testify on their behalf. Holland and Lowe were Wright's stepfather and uncle, respectively, and Fred Mires issued one of the affidavits of non-residency against Lizzie during the initial complaint against her by Archie. Unfortunately, no other documents pertaining to the substance of their testimony exist, but the fact that they all supplied their views against the Jones clan pointed the extent of the rivalry between the two families.⁷²

By July, W. C. sold his fourteen-room home near Christoval, thus creating the impetus for him to move. W. J. Mason purchased the large frame home along with Jones' irrigated farm totaling 111 acres for \$5,150. Mason paid Jones \$1,250 up front and issued five promissory notes for the remaining balance to be paid annually until November 1, 1905. Jones included an undivided three thirty-secondths interest in the South Concho Irrigation Company's dam and ditch. Mason's water rights provided him access to water from the

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷²Tom Green County Civil Court Records, W. C. Jones and Will C. Jones vs. GC&SF 1416, Letter from Santa Fe, 7 February 1905; Ibid, Subpoena.

irrigation company for eighteen consecutive hours every nine days. Additionally, the two parties came to an agreement on the allocation of the crops growing on the land at the time of the transfer. Jones leased out the surrounding farmland to local tenants. In turn, Jones would claim one-half of all hay grown on the acreage and one-quarter of the cotton. In making this purchase, Mason took over the rights to Jones' portion of the 1904 crops.⁷³

With the sale of his home, W. C. looked into land opportunities in San Angelo. He contacted land agents C. A. Broome and Louis Farr who told Jones about a tract of land containing just over sixty acres north of San Angelo on the Water Valley Road. The 61.67 acres came from the Joseph Hinkle Survey number 317 and ranged from the western edge of the Water Valley Road to the eastern bank of the North Concho River. Jones jumped at the opportunity to buy land that would allow him to still have plenty of space yet be near the city. At thirty dollars per acre, the land came at a much higher price than his South Concho ranch land. Jones immediately planned to have a "fine suburban home" that cost over \$6,000 to build (\$150,000 in 2012 dollars). During the time between closing the deal with Mason and the completion of construction of their new home, the Joneses stayed with Sadie and James Weddell on their ranch home near Water Valley.⁷⁴

By the end of the year, W. C. and Margaret moved into their newly built mansion on the north side of San Angelo. Jones spent the bulk of three decades making a home for himself and building a community on the South Concho. Christoval continued to grow as the Jones family packed their belongings and began the twenty-five mile trip north to their new

⁷³Tom Green County Deed Records, Book 27, 239-41.

⁷⁴*San Angelo Press*, September 8, 1904; Tom Green County Deed Records, Book 25, 611.

residence. In fact, W. C. retained ownership of the unsold portions of the village and would continue to sell lots for a short time after moving from the town. However, the risk of living in Christoval proved too much for the Joneses. Bands of armed thieves stalked the San Angelo to Sonora freight line, which traveled directly through much of W. C.'s property. The move to San Angelo represented a fresh start for the sexagenarian couple. Jones again shifted the focus of his economic activity, a shift that conformed to his advancing age and more suburban surroundings.

CHAPTER VI

ADJUSTING TO SUBURBAN LIFE

In the fall of 1904, after enjoying a Thanksgiving celebration at the Weddells' Water Valley ranch, the Jones family moved their possessions into their newly constructed home northwest of San Angelo. Their new homestead lay on the west side of the Water Valley Road where it splits from Grape Creek Road. This move represented a marked change for W. C., who prior to this found himself surrounded by a community he had created from nearly nothing. Though his homestead consisted of sixty-one acres of land, that seemed insufficient to a man accustomed to dealing in sections of land at a time. Relocating to a different part of the county, however, allowed the Joneses to escape the hostile and violent environment that he experienced around the South Concho River.¹

Soon after turning over the keys of his Christoval home to W. J. Mason, Jones placed an advertisement in the *Standard* expressing his serious desire to curtail his involvement in the agricultural sector. On October 15 he announced that his "forty section ranch (25,000 acres) situated from fifteen to twenty miles south of San Angelo; seven miles riverfront on South Concho; all patented land except four sections which latter is proved up school land." Among the many improvements included on the forty sections were five houses, one of which boasted two-stories with eleven rooms. The property that Jones put forth contained five separate pastures ranging from fifty acres to eighteen sections along with two irrigated farms aggregating one hundred forty-five acres. Additionally, Jones offered 1,600 head of

¹*San Angelo Standard*, December 10, 1904.

cattle ranging from two to four years old. An individual taking up Jones' offer would instantly become a cattle rancher.²

Whether consciously nor not, Jones' shift to an urban focus mimicked national and statewide trends. Since the Civil War, the United States' population had been becoming increasingly more urban. From 1900 to 1910 the percentage of people in the United States living in urban centers increased by six percent, reaching 45.6% total. Within another ten years, a majority of Americans made their homes in cities for the first time in the history of the nation. This trend became even more marked in Texas. While the state in 1900 remained more rural than the nation as a whole, the rate of its shift to the cities increased faster. The number of Texans living in cities increased by seven percent from 1900 to 1910.³ From the time he moved to San Angelo until the day he died, Jones partook in business ventures that better fit his new setting.

Finalizing their move from Christoval to San Angelo, Jones purchased a lot located in the Fairmont Cemetery. For thirty dollars, the Joneses took possession of lot number four in block sixteen "to have and to hold...forever, but to be used for Cemetery purposes only."⁴ Having moved their home and their final resting place away from Christoval, W. C. and Margaret faced the grim task of transferring Robert's body from his grave in the Christoval Cemetery to the new family plot. This heart-wrenching task, which occurred less than three

²*San Angelo Standard*, October 15, 1904.

³ The Federal Census defined urban populations as people living in incorporated communities with a population of at least 2,500. United States Census Records, Urban and Rural Population: 1900 to 1990, <http://www.census.gov/population/censusdata/urpop0090.txt>

⁴Tom Green County Deed Records, Book 29, 19.

years after his murder, allowed the Joneses the opportunity to sever their ties to the community that they once loved. On Robert's headstone at Fairmount the family inscribed the passage, "His sun set while yet it was day."⁵

During Jones' first year in San Angelo, he sold just over five hundred acres of land out of his advertised forty sections he placed on the market. Of the eight transactions that comprised those acres, half-involved lots in Christoval. A fifth sale came from a tract of land Jones purchased in 1904 situated in the George Schubitz Survey east of San Angelo. Jones bought 111 acres from the Schubitz Survey for \$22.70 per acre with the hope of producing a lucrative neighborhood on the edge of San Angelo. In less than a year, W. C. sold 19.73 acres from the Schubitz land to five individuals for a total of \$2135.⁶ These few transactions almost covered the original cost of the land while leaving Jones ninety acres to sell. Jones' proclivity for selling town lots for large profits bespoke his continuing shift from agriculture to urban development. Controlling multiple sections of land with various herds of livestock and crops allowed for a comfortable living, however, the quick and labor-free task of land speculation around population centers produced far greater profits in short amounts of time.

Of the five hundred acres sold during 1905, the majority came from a single transaction with T. J. Lassetter. Among the three hundred twenty acres transferred to Lassetter was the initial piece of land Jones bought in 1879 from John Lackey. The twenty-eight acre property known as the Laechelin Survey once held Jones' first flock of sheep along

⁵ Robert C. Jones Headstone, Block 16, Lot 4, Fairmount Cemetery, San Angelo, Texas.

⁶Tom Green County Deed Records, Book 28, 50, 104, 144 & 182; Tom Green County Deed Records Book 35, 157.

the South Concho twenty-six years earlier. Jones sold the property to Lassetter for \$4,000 with the express condition that Jones guarantee the deed of the several surveys against any person claiming the same land.⁷ Without the warranty clause, Lassetter's claim to the land would be open to the same sort of legal challenges Jones faced from the heirs of land he purchased decades earlier.

To assure Lassetter of the legitimacy of the deed, Jones engaged in some legal maneuvers that would create an opportunity for claimants for the land to surface. When the district court came in session in November, Jones filed two lawsuits claiming heirs of the original land patentees had forcefully ejected him from his property. Jones named T. Timms as the defendant in his lawsuit asserting his rightful ownership of the Laechelin Survey. The second suit saw Jones declare that an unknown heir of the James Kiggins Survey had ejected him from land he had owned for over twenty years. In each of the suits, Jones stated the heir, know or unknown, asked for a cash payment for damages incurred by Jones' possession of the property.⁸

As required by law, Jones paid to have a notice published in the local newspaper for eight successive weeks allowing the individuals named to come forward. In each case, however, no defendant appeared to challenge Jones' claim. The lawsuits, in fact, served as a formality to ensure Lassetter held undisputed deed to the two surveys. Texas law contained provisions for individuals who held continuous possession of real estate for periods of three,

⁷Tom Green County Deed Records, Book 32, 417.

⁸Tom Green County Civil Court Records, W. C. Jones v. T. Timms 1497; Tom Green County Civil Court Records, W. C. Jones v. Unknown Heir 1498.

five, and ten years. If no claimant came forward to challenge ownership of land after ten years of another "having peaceable and adverse possession thereof, cultivating, using or enjoying the same" then there can be no further challenges.⁹ Since Jones held the Laechelin tract since 1879 and the Kiggins tract since 1881, he had no real threat of loss of the property through legal challenges.

By 1906, Jones' desire to sell a large portion of his ranch land came to fruition. On May 24, Jones transferred to Mrs. S. L. Shaw 1,123 acres of land at the northern edge of his South Concho ranch. The tract included surveys 890, 891, 892 and the northern parts of 893 and 1202. Shaw's new land featured a one-mile long section of the western bank of the South Concho River. A twenty-foot wide irrigation channel that bisected the southern portion of the property augmented Shaw's access to water. Land with that sort of available water in Tom Green County did not come cheap, however. Mrs. Shaw paid Jones thirteen dollars per acre, totaling \$14,599 over the course of five years.¹⁰

Over the next two years, W. C. sold, in two additional deals, just over five thousand acres. Combining the three sales, Jones parted with 6,160 acres of his 25,000-acre ranch, which amounted to almost one-quarter of his ranch. The final weeks of 1907 saw the first of these two deals. Jones sold 2639 acres of his South Concho ranch to C. H. Staudifer for \$10,304.38. Included in this sale were the James Eldridge, James Webb, and Albert Black surveys from the eastern bank of the South Concho River. Jones had made a significant

⁹John Sayles, Henry Sayles, and William Vernon, *Annotated Civil Statutes of the State of Texas with Historical Notes*, vol. 4 (Kansas City: Vernon Law Book Company, 1914), 3782.

¹⁰Tom Green County Deed Records, Book 36, 159.

amount of money from the Eldridge and Black surveys by carving from them the village of Christoval and numerous irrigated farms. In fact, the property Staudifer obtained did not include irrigation rights from the South Concho Irrigation Company. That explained the relatively low \$4 per acre Staudifer paid for the land.¹¹

The final large sale of land Jones transacted took place in June 1908 and involved three surveys that stood isolated from his South Concho river ranch. W. G. D. Kilgore, J. D. Ligg and his wife Mrs. Ligg purchased from Jones 2398 acres contained in three surveys that lay just west of Susan Peak in Tom Green County. The land included no irrigation from surface water yet Kilgore and the Liggs paid nine dollars per acre for the property. That price meant this single transaction brought Jones \$21,582 (over one-half million dollars in 2012 money). Unfortunately for Jones, this deal would not last. The three purchasers failed to pay all of the eight promissory notes, eventually bringing the land back into Jones' possession four years later.¹²

Despite placing an advertisement in the *Standard* with hopes of liquidating 25,000 acres of ranchland in Tom Green County, Jones retained a large majority of that land. During the ten years between his botched sale to Kilgore and the Liggs and his death in 1918, Jones made no land deal that involved more than two hundred acres. In fact, the bulk of the land he sold after 1907 consisted of town lots and small parcels around San Angelo. The impetus to rid himself of all his land holdings that he felt in 1904 faded by 1908. As he and

¹¹Tom Green County Deed Records, Book 48, 151-55.

¹²Tom Green County Deed Records, Book 50, 539-42; Tom Green County Deed Records, Book 79, 119-20.

Margaret advanced in age, they realized the importance of passing thousands of acres of property in Tom Green and Schleicher counties to their children and grandchildren. The money they would earn from selling the land would be insubstantial compared to the tangible benefits and flexibility offered by land ownership.

Though he planned to retain most of his ranch near Christoval, Jones no longer owned the property from which he built the village. He signed away the once lucrative business of selling town lots in a growing community to Staudifer in 1907. In August of 1908 Jones, at sixty-eight years of age, decided to once again build a community, this time around his home in San Angelo. Jones platted a subdivision from the land immediately south of where his home stood. The Jones Subdivision consisted of seven lots, each containing six acres. Running along the Water Valley Road, the seven generous lots enjoyed 208 feet of road frontage and stretched back one-quarter of a mile. In addition to the lots, Jones provided two public alleys, one separating lots two and three and one between lots four and five. Jones proclaimed in the paperwork that the alleys would be for the public's continual use. The alley between lots four and five would later become the westward continuation of Twenty-Ninth Street, which ended at the Water Valley Road at that time.¹³

Within a few weeks, W. C. sold two of the seven lots from his new subdivision. J. H. Kilpatrick purchased the lot number two for \$1,200. At the rate of two hundred dollars per acre, Jones could recuperate all of the \$5,800 he spent on the 161-acre tract from which he carved his thirty-five acre subdivision. After selling all seven lots, Jones would realize a

¹³Tom Green County Deed Records, Book 52, 360-61; W. C. Jones' Subdivision Exhibit A, Cabinet A, 148.

\$1,200 profit and still have 126 acres around his home for personal use.¹⁴ W. C., in cooperation with an adjacent landowner, even planned a public road to run on the north end of the Jones Subdivision, which he named Jones Avenue. Jones allocated thirty feet from the northern edge of his subdivision running from the Water Valley Road to the newly built Concho, San Saba, and Llano Valley Railroad (CSS&LV) tracks to the southwest. Jones requested Philip C. Lee, who had begun work to establish his own subdivision called Allen-Lee Heights, set aside an additional thirty feet to make Jones Avenue a full sixty feet wide. However, Allen-Lee Heights never came into being, thus negating the need for the proposed Jones Avenue.¹⁵

Jones' subdivision never paid off in the way he hoped. After the initial sale to Kilpatrick, Jones sold only two more lots from the seven, both of which went to Silas H. Keeton. About one year apart, Keeton bought lots one and three for a total of \$2620.34. Because Keeton represented the last buyer of land from the subdivision, Jones did not fully recuperate the money he invested in the land surrounding his home and subdivision. Even with the \$1,089 he obtained from granting the CSS&LV 7.26 acres in right-of-way access through the property, Jones fell \$945.66 short of breaking even.¹⁶ Jones' lots may have been too large, and consequently too expensive, to appeal to the San Angelo market. A nearby development called Woodlawn, offering lots measuring only fifty feet by one hundred fifty

¹⁴Tom Green County Deed Records, Book 51, 172.

¹⁵Tom Green County Deed Records, Book 63, 508-9.

¹⁶Tom Green County Deed Records, Book 53, 404; Tom Green County Deed Records, Book 63, 115 & 508.

feet at the rate of \$100, proved more successful despite being further from the business center of San Angelo.¹⁷

After his move to San Angelo, Jones engaged in another financial enterprise that conformed to his urban environment. Beginning on penultimate day of 1907 and continuing through the spring of 1913, Jones took to buying land debt in the form of promissory notes. W. C. purchased promissory notes for some amount less than the face value of the note from the holders of the notes. The transfer would provide quick cash for the person holding the note and result in profit for Jones from two sources. First, the difference between the face value of the note and the price paid by Jones would produce a healthy profit for Jones with minimal effort. Second, the interest paid by the indebted party would further enhance that profit. While Jones bought promissory notes for about six years, seven of the fifteen transactions of this kind came during 1909.

All of the deals Jones made during this period included private terms except for one. On February 11, 1910, Jones purchased eight notes from F. C. Warnock with the explicit terms expressed within the deed record. Six of the notes came from a deal between Warnock and W. P. Lanford for a thirty-six acre piece of land near Christoval. Lanford owed \$641.66 scheduled to be paid back over four years at a rate of eight percent interest paid annually. P. D. Swift executed the remaining two notes for \$412.60 for seven acres in the same area as Lanford's purchase. In all, Jones bought notes with \$1054.26 in face value for \$904.¹⁸

¹⁷*San Angelo Standard*, September 3, 1909.

¹⁸Tom Green County Deed Records, Book 65, 65-66.

Assuming Lanford and Swift made their payments then Jones would realize over fourteen percent profit not including interest.

In eighty percent of the transactions Jones collected the interest and principal of the notes he bought without incident, however, the other twenty percent of the debtors defaulted, which led to lawsuits. P. D. Swift was one of those who failed to pay. Swift managed to pay only \$50 toward his debt of \$412.60 over the course of two years. With the outstanding balance past due, Jones filed a suit against Swift to recover the balance. To complicate matters, Swift sold the seven-acre parcel of land to D. G. Howton just one month after Swift made the partial payment of \$50 toward his debt to Jones. Swift deeded the land to Howton without explaining the vendor's lien Jones held on the property. Tom Green County Sheriff H. C. Allen received an order from Judge J. W. Timmins calling for an auction of the seven acres to compensate Jones. On February 3, 1914, Jones purchased the land at the auction with a bid of \$400. Of that amount, \$30.65 went to pay for the court costs and the sheriff's fees. The remaining \$369.35 reverted to W. C. to compensate for his loss. Ultimately, Jones made \$6.75 more than the face value of the notes along with receiving the deed to seven acres of land.¹⁹

Buying promissory notes provided Jones with an opportunity to make a quick return on relatively small local investments. Not considering the three situations where he went to court to claim his money, Jones bought promissory notes that held a total face value of \$8378.53 during the six years he practiced this form of investment. More than half of that

¹⁹Tom Green County Civil Court Records, W. C. Jones v. P. D. Swift et al, 2558; Tom Green County District Court Execution Docket, Book D, 135.

came from 1909 transactions alone. Extrapolating the fifteen percent profit he earned from the one case with published terms of sale, Jones realized around \$1,250 in additional income, which amounts to approximately \$30,000 in 2012 money. That total does not take into account the interest that would have accrued on the various notes over their duration. While this would not provide a comfortable living for the Joneses, this investment activity did supplement Jones' income during his twilight years.

Even at the age of seventy-two, W. C. maintained his ability to remain at the edge of the economic curve in Tom Green County. In the first weeks of 1913 Jones signed a twelve month contract with G. W. Lewis to begin exploring the nine thousand acre Jones West Pasture near Christoval. The contract allowed Lewis the right to "prospect on said lands for Gas, Oil or minerals" but did not allow him to remove any found products prior to notifying Jones. Lewis also did not have any right to use grass or timber from the pasture. Rather than hoping to earn a substantial living from royalties earned from the discovery of oil or gas, Jones stipulated that Lewis would have the option to purchase any of the land at the rate of ten dollars per acre.²⁰

Since Spindletop struck oil near Houston, Texas, twelve years earlier, oil exploration had become an increasingly common activity in the Lone Star State. Individuals hoping to strike the next massive oil well began searching land in the vicinity of the eastern Texas gusher. Over time wildcatters pushed exploration farther west. Explorers drilled small wells near Brownwood, Texas, in 1910. Amarillo businessmen sought to find the next paying well in the Southern Plains by 1914. Abilene entrepreneurs soon followed their Amarillo

²⁰Tom Green County Deed Records, Book 74, 88-89.

counterparts, funding exploration efforts in Taylor County in the fall of 1915. Those willing to take risks began searching the vast lands of western Texas for oil and Jones found himself among the first cohort.²¹

The naïveté of Jones' first oil exploration contract left him open to lose a remarkable amount of money if Lewis discovered a large reservoir of oil or gas. That did not happen, however, and Jones soon rectified his agreement with Lewis. By August of 1913, only seven months into their original agreement, Jones drew up an extension of his contract with Lewis that modified the terms of the earlier document. The new language stated Lewis' "right to enter said lands to prospect for gas, oil and other minerals, is hereby continued in force, but the option to purchase said lands as set out in said contract, is hereby rescinded and terminated."²² By retaining ownership of the property, Jones would not risk the chance of being cut out of the potential profits from any hydrocarbons found on the land he had owned for decades.

Lewis' new agreement laid out terms for both the process of exploration and the payment schedules for various finds. Within thirty days of the beginning of the contract, Lewis would begin work on an exploratory well that he would drill to a depth of one thousand feet or until he struck a deposit of a valuable mineral. Additionally, he agreed to continue prospecting "in good faith and with reasonable diligence during the term of the lease." Jones claimed the right to one-eighth of any oil, ten cents per ton of coal, one-tenth of

²¹ Carlson, *Amarillo*, 82-93; Naomi Hatton Kincaid, "Oil Development in the Abilene Area," *West Texas Historical Association Year Book*, 21, 22-24.

²²Tom Green County Deed Records, Book 74, 506-7

the net proceeds of any other minerals, and \$150 per year rent for each gas well produced as a result of Lewis' work. A final stipulation of the contract with Lewis stated he could not interfere with other lessees of the property.²³ Jones' new contract with Lewis allowed him to retain a percentage of the unknown profits that lay beneath the surface of his property.

In addition to the oil and gas lease with Lewis, Jones granted G. R. Love the right to run livestock on his west pasture. For a period of seven years, Love paid Jones \$1,900 per year on a semi-annual basis, with \$950 due in April and October. During the period of the lease, Love agreed to maintain the fencing and all improvements on the property. Within the first six months of the lease, Love also stated he would build, at his own expense, "A good substantial four room house, a two story barn," several water tanks, and a dipping vat. Love also acknowledged the fact that Jones leased the same land for oil exploration, and offered to provide full access to the land for that purpose.²⁴

After the expiration of his oil exploration contract with Lewis, Jones decided to have Wiley Jemeyson, the son of the man who bought James Weddell's South Concho ranch in 1899, continue the work where Lewis left off. The new contract included the same terms as that of Lewis' deal except Jones explicitly granted Jemeyson ownership of all minerals located in the lease. Sometime between the signing of the contract on July 7, 1915 and the end of 1916 Jemeyson struck oil in the southeastern portion of Jones' west pasture. The Jemeyson well was located on the Leonard Strauss Survey, not far from the San Angelo to

²³Ibid.

²⁴Tom Green County Deed Records, Book 81, 343-4.

Sonora highway. Few details of the original strike remain, but the oil well held enough significance to be featured on a property map of Tom Green County produced in 1916.²⁵

While exploring Jones' west pasture for hydrocarbons, Jemeyson came across a large underground reservoir of water. This discovery came at a time when people touted the benefits of medicinal hot baths and natural mineral water. Because their original contract had no provision for capitalizing on such a discovery, Jones included a clause in the renewal that allowed Jemeyson to have an opportunity to develop his find. At the time of the contract, the two parties did not know the exact nature of the water, but Jones stated if "it is found that the water from said well can be profitably and advantageously used, either as mineral water or as hot water for bathing purposes" then Jemeyson can build pools or bathhouses, provided he defers one-eighth of the proceeds to Jones.²⁶

Despite his continued economic agility, Jones' advanced age began to catch up with him. After he lost Margaret in 1911, W. C. lived in his large north San Angelo home with his sister Jane. In early January 1918, Jones suffered a serious stroke that left him paralyzed for several weeks, leaving him confined to his home for the remainder of the winter and through spring of that year. By that summer, he felt considerably better and journeyed into San Angelo with Jane on several occasions. In October his stamina began to wane. On Sunday, November 10, Jones' family forced him to his bed due to his illness. Less than two

²⁵Tom Green County Deed Records, Book 81, 173-4. Map of Tom Green County Compiled by J. J. Goodfellow, October 1916, Map Collection, West Texas Collection, Angelo State University, San Angelo, Texas.

²⁶Tom Green County Deed Records, Book 89, 591-2.

weeks later, on the morning of November 22, W. C. Jones passed away at the age of seventy-eight.²⁷

The Jones family held W. C.'s funeral the following day. First Presbyterian pastor A. F. Cunningham conducted the service at Jones' home that afternoon, followed by the procession to Fairmount Cemetery. Notable citizens from Tom Green County served as Jones' pallbearers: M. B. Pulliam, M. L. Mertz, L. L. Farr, J. Willis Johnson, Gerome W. Shield, George E. Webb, E. McCrohan, and John R. Nasworthy. His headstone at Fairmount carried the quote from Psalm 119:165, "Great peace have they which love thy law."²⁸

W. C., in his 1916 will, named his only son Will C. Jones as his executor. Will began the task of administering his father's estate the Monday following his funeral. An inventory of Jones' real estate at the time of his death revealed his considerable holdings. In Tom Green County Jones owned 11,649.2 acres of land distributed in fourteen complete sections and fifteen partial sections. The value listed for these tracts of land totaled \$67,284. This appraisal allowed five dollars per acre for the majority of the land, which consisted of grazing ranch land with no surface water access. However, the few parcels that W. C. owned in the immediate vicinity of San Angelo carried larger appraisals.²⁹

Jones also owned land in Schleicher County. The bulk of this property came from the land patented by his late son, Robert. Jones managed to acquire the two half sections that abutted Robert's land that Archie Wright won in his lawsuit against Lizzie in 1904. Those

²⁷*San Angelo Standard*, November 22, 1918.

²⁸ William C. Jones Headstone, Block 16, Lot 4, Fairmount Cemetery, San Angelo, Texas.

²⁹Tom Green County Probate Minutes, Book I, 383-4.

two half sections were isolated from the other three sections Wright obtained, being surrounded by land owned by the Joneses. In all, W. C. held 8066.11 acres in the county contained in ten complete and eight incomplete sections. Appraisers listed a value for this land at \$27,602.13.³⁰

Other real estate Jones owned included land he shared legal ownership with Will and a fair number of lots in San Angelo. The land Jones held an undivided one-half interest in amounted to 5,143 acres from ten sections in Tom Green County. Market value for those lands equaled \$16,625.91. In his adopted home of San Angelo, Jones claimed ownership to twenty-five town lots scattered around the city. The market value listed in his probate inventory for his lots came to \$6,100. After including his cash on hand at the time of his death, twenty shares in the First National Bank of San Angelo, and four shares of San Angelo Fair Grounds Stock, W. C. Jones' total assets totaled \$131,532, or \$1.98 million in 2012 dollars.³¹

Jones made three special bequests before turning his attention to his children. First, to ensure she could maintain a comfortable lifestyle, W. C. left his sister Jane the dividends from this First National Bank of San Angelo stock. He also gave her one thousand dollars in cash, but stated if "she has not expended all of said One Thousand Dollars at the time of her death, then and in that event only, the balance of said One Thousand Dollars shall revert to and become a part of my Estate." Jones hoped that these bequests would afford Jane, who

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

instead of marrying helped W. C. and Margaret in managing their family over the decades, some additional financial security for the remainder of her life.³²

Each of the grandchildren received one hundred dollars in cash, to be paid to them once they reached eighteen years of age. The only exception to this was Robert C. Jones, Jr. Because of his disadvantaged start in life, having lost his father before he had a chance to know him, W. C. allotted Robert two tracts of land. One of these parcels amounted to four sections of land to the northeast of Christoval, the same land that Kilgore and Ligg defaulted on in 1908. To supplement this ranchland, Jones gave Robert a 206 acre irrigated farm near the Mullen School House in eastern Tom Green County. However, Robert would not receive full access to the property until he reached the age of twenty-three. W. C. directed Will to hold the land and to apply the revenue derived from it to fund Robert's education.³³

The final stipulation of W. C.'s will sought to compensate his son for all the work he would do as the executor of his estate as well as his prior work as a partner to Jones. For the management of the estate, W. C. ensured Will would receive five percent of all the proceeds from land sales and from the management of Robert's property during the stated period. Finally, Jones declared, "As a token of the esteem for the services heretofore rendered me, and which I think will continue to be rendered me by my only Son, Will C. Jones, in assisting in my business affiars [*sic*] without price and the hope of reward, I hereby give and bequeath to my said son, Will C. Jones all horses owned by me at the time of my death."³⁴

³²Ibid, 381.

³³Ibid, 382.

³⁴Ibid, 381.

Jones' list of assets contained no mention of livestock aside from the horses he gave to his son, showing how complete his shift from his agrarian lifestyle had been. The epitaphial newspaper article following his death romantically posited, "The only time of his life, after reaching manhood, when he was not the owner of a horse or of livestock of some kind was while crossing the ocean to this country."³⁵ Just a few lines later, the article admits that his activity in the livestock industry had waned for years prior to his death. Jones' activity in more urban occupational endeavors, distance from the land he owned, and increasing age prevented him from continuing to ranch as had for so many years.

³⁵*San Angelo Standard*, November 22, 1918.

CONCLUSION

When W. C. Jones and his family entered Tom Green County in the summer of 1878, they found a land that had just been carved from the wilderness of western Texas through the brute force of the United States military banishing the original inhabitants. The county, despite having a sparse population, included more land than the states of Massachusetts and Connecticut combined. Individuals who made the trek to the remote Concho River Valley looked to the agricultural opportunities allowed by the promise of inexpensive land. Immigrants from older sections of the nation and older nations in the world rushed to grab a piece of the vast American West in hopes of achieving financial security through the acquisition of property—a task that would have been far more difficult in more established regions.¹

At the behest of family members who found the area suitable for raising sheep, Jones took a large loan to establish what would become a substantial ranching operation in the southern portion of the county. Traveling from the nearest population center, San Antonio, Jones acquired a flock of sheep and made the two hundred mile journey to the northwest. He found a land that boasted of having "better grass and more of it than any county in the state. Five splendid streams with numerous tributaries, run within her boundaries," conditions anyone would find favorable for raising livestock.² Recognizing the importance of water and the richness of the resources provided by the life-giving currents of the South Concho River,

¹Henderson, "Tom Green County," *Handbook of Texas*.

²*San Angelo Standard*, May 3, 1883.

Jones focused his economic energy on acquiring ample land with clear access to the spring water.

During the 1880s, Tom Green County had just begun to build the requisite institutions of civilization. The nascent community supported two banks in October 1884, with a third being built. While not yet constructed, plans existed for the creation of a public school with \$3,000 set aside for the endeavor.³ As the population of the region increased, so did the need for improving the transportation infrastructure. When one of the new routes bisected his land, Jones chose to build a community from his land. By providing social institutions within Christoval, Jones created an outlying population center that ultimately produce a remarkable amount of profit for the rancher.

Overwhelmingly the emphasis for economic development came in the form of raising livestock, with secondary consideration paid to growing crops. The *Standard* claimed the principal industry in the county at the time was raising cattle. The wool and mohair industry came in a close second.⁴ Jones capitalized on the sheep raising industry for the first two decades of his time in Tom Green County. Slowly, however, he began to expand his investments in other livestock—horses and cattle. By the time the wool industry's viability came under attack by the federal government in the form of tariff manipulation, Jones' interest in cattle had fully eclipsed that of sheep.

Ultimately, the lawlessness of the region beyond San Angelo proved too much for the aging man. At the age of sixty-five, Jones and his wife abandoned their ranchland and the

³*San Angelo Standard*, October 4, 1884.

⁴ Ibid.

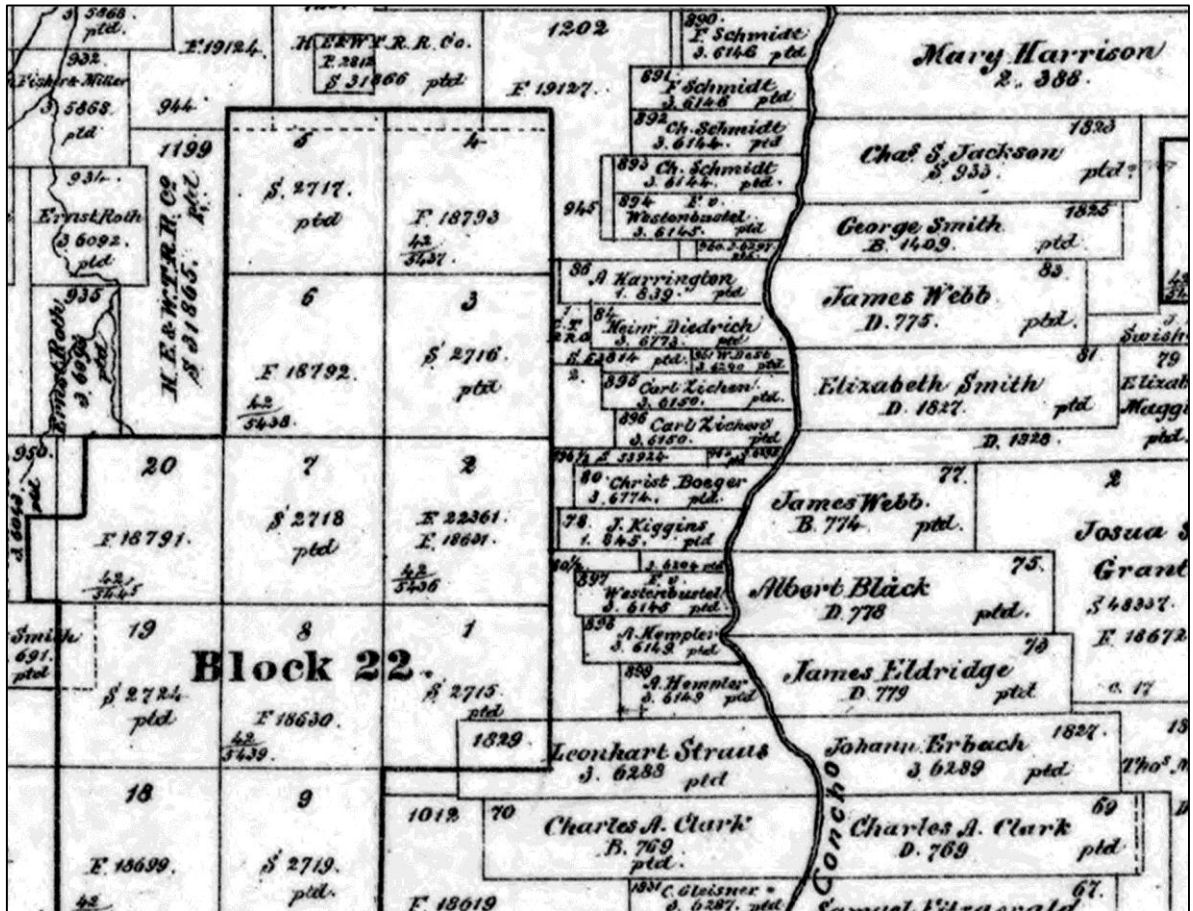
community of Christoval for more a more civilized lifestyle in San Angelo. Just as Jones moved to a more urban setting, so did his mode of making money. Rather than trading in cattle, Jones opted to trade in real estate. He created a less-than-successful subdivision on the outskirts of San Angelo, again attempting to build a community around his home. More indicative of his shift to an urban lifestyle was his new endeavor of buying land debt notes for profit. By this time, Jones had bypassed the need to actually own land to make money, instead just using his vast amounts of capital to free up cash for debt holders. Again, Jones' transformation conformed to the growing city of San Angelo. By 1910, the time Jones worked to refinance land debt, San Angelo boasted over ten thousand residents making it the most populous city in the region, eclipsing nearby Abilene by over a thousand people. This status meant San Angelo served as a commercial hub for all of west-central Texas.

Jones' last financial expedition involved an industry that would define the region within a decade. Starting in 1913, Jones was among the pioneers of oil exploration in the Concho Valley and West Texas. Within a few years of Jones' beginning, many other landowners and investors would be examining the depths of western Texas for the precious hydrocarbons. Santa Rita Number One, the gusher that defined the potential of the Permian Basin and produced an economic boost to the region that continues to the current day, began gushing oil into the painted sky of Reagan County in 1923. The proximity of the new well to San Angelo made the city a natural base of operations for the industry. A number of the largest buildings in San Angelo came into being because of that decade's boon.

Rather than accept an economic status quo, W. C. Jones worked to shape his financial fate. He did this through readily adopting technologies that provided a sense of security

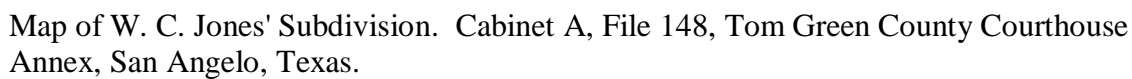
against the unrelenting punishment doled out by natural forces. Irrigation, windmills, fencing, and pear burners all represent technologies that Jones used to make life more consistent. Jones never clung to any particular industry out of a sense of duty or loyalty. When he sensed trouble or an easier, more lucrative way, Jones willingly changed course. This represented the most significant facet of his entrepreneurial character and the reason he enjoyed such success. Family lore claimed Jones operated solely as a sheepman. While that was true for a time, that story missed an essential aspect of his life. The best way to sum up his life is to say Jones was a businessman, an adept businessman. Through his financial acumen, Jones shifted with the times, predicting the direction of the region's economy and adapting to the changing winds.

APPENDIX A



Map of south-central Tom Green County that includes much of the land W. C. Jones acquired for his South Concho Ranch. Christoval would be created in the western end of the James Eldridge Survey. *Map of The East Part of Tom Green County*, Map, July 1894; digital image, University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, <http://texashistory.unt.edu>; crediting Texas General Land Office, Austin , Texas.

Exhibit A



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